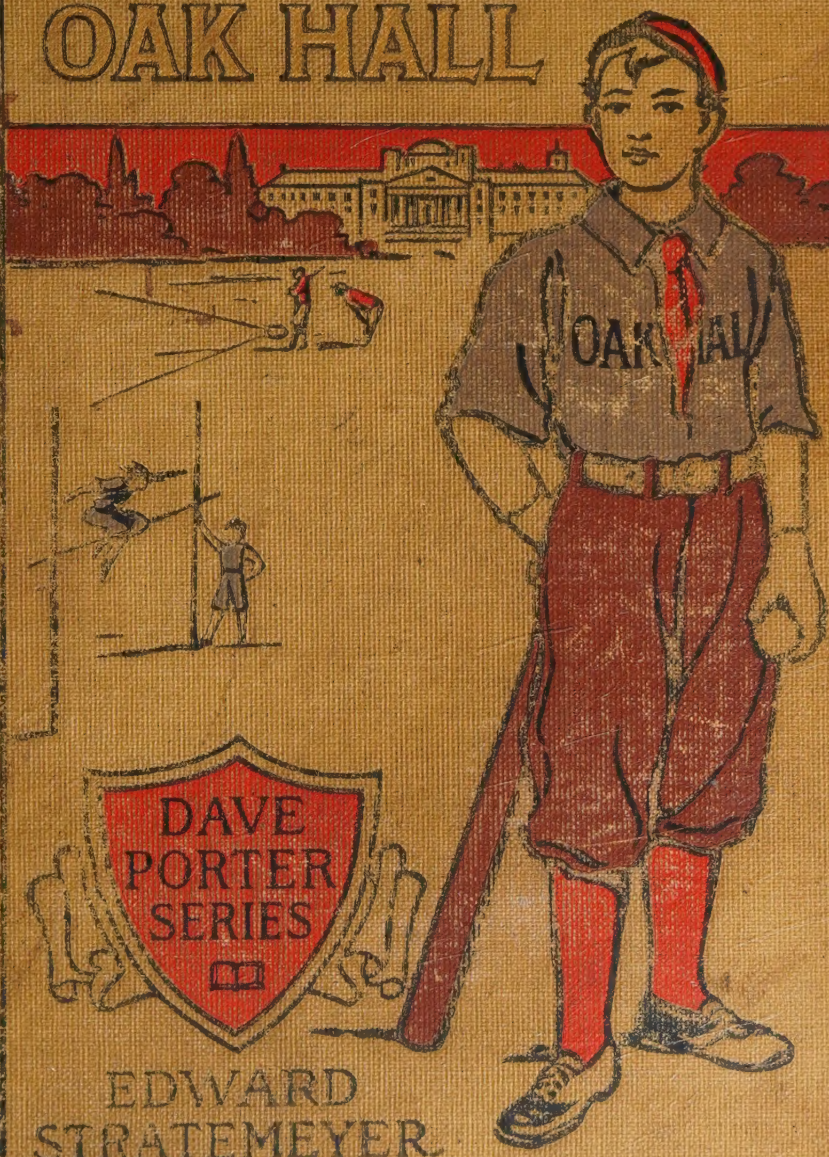
DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL



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"Three strikes! Batter out!" Oak Hall had won the game!
Page 303.

Dave Porter Series

DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL

OR

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF AN AMERICAN BOY

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Under the Mikado's Flag," "At the Fall of Port Arthur," "Larry the Wanderer," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series," "Colonial Series," "American Boys' Biographical Series," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY HAROLD MATTHEWS BRETT

BOSTON
LEE AND SHEPARD

Published, August, 1905

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DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL

Norwood Press
BERWICK AND SMITH CO.
Norwood, Mass.
U. S. A.

PREFACE

"DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL" is a complete tale in itself, but forms the first volume of a line to be issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

In writing this story I have had but one object in view,—to present to my young readers a faithful picture of life at an American boarding school of to-day. Oak Hall represents a type of institution to be found by the score in many of our States, and the scholars attending the school are no better or worse than are the boys elsewhere. Each lad has his peculiarities: one is bright and clever, another dull and slow; one upright and manly, another low and cunning; one full of life and merriment, another given to look on the dark side of things. Taken as a whole, such a school represents the world at large, for "men are but youths of larger growth."

It may be thought by some that Dave is an unusually bright and clever boy. Such, however, is far from being the fact. In every school there are certain lads who stand head and shoulders above those who surround them. As among men, they are natural born leaders, and they show this leader-

ship at the very first opportunity given to them. When a chance comes, they know at once how to take hold and make the most of it. Dave was a poor boy, of unknown parentage, and had he not watched his opportunities and made the most of them he would have remained forever in his humble station in life and never been used as the main character of this tale.

In closing this brief foreword let me once again thank those thousands of readers who have signified their appreciation of my efforts to amuse and instruct them. I have read the numerous letters sent to me with deep gratification, and my one regret is, that it is physically impossible for me to answer all of them. I sincerely trust the present story proves to be all that my readers desire.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

May 25, 1905.

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DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING DAVE PORTER

"HELLO, Dave, where are you going?"

"I'm going up the mountainside, to look for huckleberries, Ben. Do you want to go along?"

"How much is there in it?" asked Ben Basswood, with a grin. "I never work unless I get paid for it."

"Well, you can have all the huckleberries you find. Mr. Jackson is paying eight cents a quart for them," answered Dave Porter.

"Eight cents! And how many quarts do you think I can pick in an afternoon?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Ben—six or eight quarts at least."

"That wouldn't pay me," said Ben Basswood, whose parents were well-to-do and who was furnished regularly with spending-money. "But I'll go along, just the same, to keep you company," he added. "How is old Potts this morning?"

"Mr. Potts isn't feeling very well. His head

seems to bother him a great deal lately," and for a moment a shadow crossed Dave Porter's face. "I really think he ought to have a doctor."

"Won't he have any?"

"No. He says he can't afford it, and besides he would rather doctor himself."

"He's just a bit off, isn't he?" went on Ben, with a curious look at his companion. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Dave," he added, hastily. "But that's true, isn't it? I heard some men downtown talking about it."

"I don't know what you mean by 'off,'" answered Dave. "He is rather peculiar, but so are lots of other folks around here."

"He isn't any relation to you, is he?"

"No."

"How long have you lived with him?"

"About six years."

"Then you ought to know him pretty well, Dave."

"I do—after a fashion. He's a hard man to understand. Sometimes he is cheery and talkative and then again he will say but little all day."

"He hasn't been able to do much on the farm this summer, I suppose?"

"Hardly anything, Ben. I've had to do what was done."

"It's rather rough on you."

"Oh, I haven't minded it," was Dave Porter's

cheery answer. "I only wish Mr. Potts would get better."

There was a brief spell of silence, during which time both boys trudged along the road leading to the mountainside. Dave carried a tin kettle and a basket, which he hoped to fill with huckleberries before sundown. It was a warm summer day, with the sun shining brightly, and the birds singing merrily, just the day to make the heart of any boy glad. Yet Dave heaved a long sigh, which his companion could not help but notice.

"I suppose it makes you feel bad to have him sick," said Ben.

"It isn't only that, Ben, it's something else."

"Oh!"

"I don't know that I ought to say anything, but I feel as if I must tell somebody," continued Dave. "You know old Aaron Poole, from Dixonville."

"Of course I do, Diamond Poole they used to call him. He's got a son, Nat, a regular high-flyer, so they tell me."

"Aaron Poole holds a mortgage on our farm. Mr. Potts can't pay the interest this year, and Mr. Poole says he is going to foreclose."

"And sell the place?"

"I suppose so."

"How much is the mortgage?"

"Twelve hundred dollars."

"That's as much as the place is worth."

"I suppose that is true."

"If the place is sold what will you and old Potts do?" went on Ben, with added interest.

"I don't know, and that is what is bothering me. If he was a younger man, and well, we might hire some other farm, but as it is I can't see any way to turn."

"You might get a place on some other farm, Dave. I know you can do a regular man's work."

"Yes, but that wouldn't help Mr. Potts, and I feel that I ought to do all I can for him. He did what he could for me."

"You'll have a job of it, supporting yourself and a sick man, too. Besides, if he gets much worse he'll have to have somebody to take care of him, and you can't do that and work, too."

"I'll have to do it—or do the best I can," and Dave heaved another sigh, for the prospect ahead was certainly a dark one.

"How soon do you expect to hear from Aaron Poole?"

"The interest on the mortgage is due to-morrow, and Mr. Poole says he won't wait for his money."

"He's a hard-hearted wretch, if ever there was one!" burst out Ben, indignantly. "Do you remember the widow Fram? He put her out of her cottage in the dead of winter just because she got behind in her rent. Father said it was the meanest

"And I'll help you, Dave. I can't pick many, I know; but every little helps, they say." — *Page 5.*

thing he had ever heard of. He got the widow another place."

"Well, we have got to do something, that is certain," said Dave. "For the present I am going to pick all the huckleberries I can for Mr. Jackson. That will give us a little money to fall back on."

"And I'l help you, Dave. I can't pick many, I know; but every little helps, they say." And a moment later the conversation came to an end and each of the lads began to gather the berries, which grew in scattered patches all over the mountain.

Dave Porter was a youth of fifteen, of medium size, with dark eyes and curly dark hair. He was healthy, with muscles hardened by constant work in the open air. His look was both fearless and frank, and there was an expression about his mouth which spoke of a will power bound to assert itself whenever needed.

Dave was a poorhouse boy, and of unknown parentage. About twelve years before this story opens he had been found, one summer evening, wandering near the railroad tracks just outside of the village of Crumville. Some farm hands had discovered him, sitting on a fallen tree, calling for "the bad train to come back!" From the little fellow the farm hands had gathered that the train had stopped, and he had been put off by "a bad, bad man, who wouldn't buy the candy after all!" The waif was tired and hungry, and was taken to

a neighboring farmhouse and there fed and put to bed.

For two weeks the little fellow remained at the farmhouse, and during that time every effort was made to find out his identity, and learn why he had been abandoned in such a heartless fashion. Questioned on the point, he said his name was Dave, or Davy, and sometimes he added Porter, and then, again, Dun-Dun, whatever that might mean. Because of this, he was generally spoken of as Dave Porter, and that was the name that eventually clung to him.

All efforts to ascertain who the waif was proved fruitless, and the lost one was thereupon turned over to the matron of the district poorhouse. As fortune would have it, she proved a kind woman, and brought up the little lad as if he were her own. He was given a fair amount of schooling, and likewise religious instruction, and was also taught to work.

Dave remained at the poorhouse farm until he was about nine years old. During those years Crumville grew from a village into a town, and many rich people settled there, including a Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, who erected a jewelry works employing several hundred hands. Mr. Wadsworth was a liberal and public-spirited citizen, and we shall hear more of him in the near future.

As Crumville grew, the poorhouse with its farm

was removed to another locality and placed under an entirely different management. The three boys at the institution were bound out to such persons as desired them, and Dave was sent to live with an elderly man named Caspar Potts, who had, the year before, purchased one of the hillside farms back of Crumville. By many Caspar Potts was considered to be "a bit off," as they expressed it, but as he appeared to be able to support Dave, the poorhouse management did not hesitate to place the waif in his charge. Dave was nothing to them, and all they wished to do was to get rid of him.

The boy had been very skeptical about going to live with old Caspar Potts, but his doubts soon vanished, and inside of a month he was glad the change had come to him. Much to his surprise, he learned that Caspar Potts had once been a college professor, but over-application to work had broken him down mentally, and then the man—who in his younger days had been brought up on a farm—had given up teaching and gone back to the soil.

"Stick by me, Dave," the old man had said. "Stick by me, and I'll feed and clothe you, and give you an education besides." And Caspar Potts had kept his word as far as he was able, and now Dave had more of an education than most lads of his years. More than that, he had learned many

things not taught in the lower schools, and of these, in his own quiet way, he was rather proud.

During the past year matters had been going gradually from bad to worse. Through the winter Caspar Potts was very sick, and this illness ate up almost every dollar the man had saved. When spring came he was too weak to work at plowing and planting, and consequently this fell to Dave's lot. The two lived alone, and there were times when Caspar Potts was certainly more than half out of his mind, acting childish, and begging Dave not to desert him.

"I am not going to desert you," had been Dave's answer. "You have done for me as long as you could, and now I am going to do for you."

"But they may put us out of this house, Dave."

"If they do, we'll have to find some other place to live."

"I cannot undertake to develop another farm, lad; I am too old and feeble."

"Oh, you mustn't talk that way, professor." Dave sometimes called him professor just to please him, and it suited the old man very well. "You are not so very old,—and you'll feel better before long."

"Do you think so, my boy?" questioned the old man, wistfully.

"I'm sure of it."

"It does me good to hear you say so, Dave.

You must know, for you're a smart lad, and you are bound to be a great man some day—I can see it sticking out all over you. Tell me now, would you like to be a professor, or would you rather be a farmer?"

"I don't know exactly what I'd like to be, just yet. I don't know enough of the outside world."

"Ha!" the old man drew a long breath. "That is true, Davy; that is true. You'll find it a hard world, with many sharp corners and many pitfalls. But you'll get through, you'll get through,—I can see it in your face. You'll get through!"

CHAPTER II

AN UNACCEPTED OFFER

WHEN Dave returned home that night he was eighty-four cents richer than when he started out, directly after dinner. Ben Basswood had helped him to pick huckleberries until sundown and insisted that Dave should keep the entire proceeds.

"I like to help you, Dave," said Ben, on parting. "If you ever get in a hole let me know." He would have offered Dave some of his spending money, but felt that the lad would not accept it.

When Dave reached the cottage in which Caspar Potts and himself resided he found the old man walking up and down on the porch and wringing his hands.

"Oh, so you are back at last, Dave! I was afraid you had—had left me!"

"You know better than that, professor."

"But it is so late."

"Yes, I stayed up on the mountain longer than I intended."

"Did you get any huckleberries?"

"Over ten quarts, and sold them to Mr. Jackson for eighty-four cents."

"That's fine!" The old man's face brightened. "I could do that work—it's not hard. But I don't see how I'm to get up the mountain," and his face fell again.

"Has anybody been here since I went away?"

"Yes; Aaron Poole's son,—a very high-toned young man. He drove up in a fancy cart to tell me that his father would be here to-morrow morning for the interest on the mortgage."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I—I told him I couldn't pay up just yet—that he must wait a little."

"And what did he say to that?"

"His nose went up into the air and he said I must pay. That if I didn't his father was going to have the place sold. He was very lordly and—and somewhat abusive."

"Abusive? What do you mean by that?"

"He—he said his father was foolish to trust his money to such a—a—crazy, good-for-nothing fellow as myself." Caspar Potts' lips quivered as he spoke. "He said I was a—a lunatic, and ought to be in an asylum."

"I wish Nat Poole would mind his own business," cried Dave. "If I ever meet him I'll give him a piece of my mind."

"I am not crazy, am I, Dave?" asked the old professor, anxiously. "Tell me truly, lad?"

"No, you are not crazy, and I don't think you

will ever be," was the ready answer. "You've been sick, that's all."

"Sometimes I feel very weak here." Caspar Potts tapped his forehead. "But it doesn't last long."

"What you need is a good long rest, professor."

"Yes, yes; but how can I rest when these troubles——"

"These troubles will all solve themselves somehow." Dave spoke as bravely as possible, solely for the old man's benefit, and not because he saw any solution himself. "Don't let's meet them halfway."

"Very well, lad; I'll do as you say," and then Caspar Potts shuffled into the cottage, much comforted.

The conversation did not comfort Dave, and his heart was heavy within him as he hurried around, preparing a scanty supper for the old man and himself. Caspar Potts had not thought of eating, and only did so after repeated urgings by the boy.

"You've got to eat to get strong again," said Dave. "Here, let me give you some more fried potatoes and another egg."

"Eat the potatoes yourself, Dave; I'll take the egg. That's enough for me."

In the morning Dave was up at five o'clock and working around the truck garden. After breakfast, he went out to hoe corn, but kept his eye on

the road which ran past the house, from Crumville to Dixonville. Caspar Potts came out to aid him, but soon had to give up through sheer weakness.

"I—I can't do it," he panted. "It takes all the breath out of me."

"Sit down in the shade and rest," said Dave. "I can easily hoe the corn alone."

It was approaching noon when a buggy hove into sight on the road. It was drawn by a fine-looking horse and came forward at a spanking gait. In the buggy was a portly man of fifty, with a dark face and heavy black mustache, Mr. Aaron Poole.

"Mr. Poole!" murmured Caspar Potts, "I—I wish I was stronger to-day!"

"Let me help you to the house," answered Dave, and caught him by the arm. They had barely reached the porch when Aaron Poole strode up the dooryard path and confronted them.

"Good-morning, Mr. Poole," said Caspar Potts, politely. "Will you walk in and have a chair?"

"No, I just as soon stay out here," was the brusque answer. "I suppose you know what I am here for?" went on the newcomer, with a sharp look at first the old man and then at Dave.

"Yes, I know," answered Caspar Potts, feebly.

"I believe you told my son you couldn't pay that interest money."

"Not just yet, Mr. Poole. In a short while—perhaps a few weeks—when I am well again——"

"I don't intend to wait, Mr. Potts. The mortgage will be due in three months, and then the whole amount will have to be paid."

"The whole amount!" cried Caspar Potts, aghast.

"That is what I said, sir."

"Won't you renew——"

"No, I want the money; and I want that interest now."

"As I said before, I can't pay it. I've been sick all winter, and——"

"It seems to me you might wait a little, Mr. Poole," said Dave, interrupting him. "We'll pay you as soon as we can."

"Humph! Who are you, Mr. Potts' son?"

"No, sir; I work for him and live with him."

"Oh, yes, I remember now; you're the boy he took from the poorhouse. Well, I don't want any poorhouse urchin to advise me, do you understand? I am here for my money."

Dave's face flushed, and some angry words rushed to his lips, but he suppressed them.

"You—you have no right to insult the boy!" came from Caspar Potts. "He is a fine lad, even if he did come from the poorhouse."

"Insult him? Bosh! But we won't talk about that. Are you going to pay or not?"

"I cannot pay."

"Then I am going to let the law take its course."

Aaron Poole paused. "That is, unless you want to make a deal with me."

"What kind of a deal?"

"I don't believe the property is worth a cent more than the mortgage, but to save trouble I am willing to give you a hundred dollars and take the place just as it stands."

"I think it is worth more than the mortgage," came quickly from Dave.

"Boy, you hold your tongue. I am dealing with Mr. Potts."

"Don't you take the offer, Mr. Potts."

At these words from the youth, Aaron Poole strode forward and shook his fist in Dave's face.

"I want you to be quiet!" he roared, passionately. "This is none of your business."

"But it is my business," responded the boy, with spirit. "Do you know what your son did yesterday? He came here and told Mr. Potts he was a lunatic. If Mr. Potts is that, then I am going to see to it that you don't cheat him."

"Cheat him!" Aaron Poole grew white. "Boy, if you talk like that to me, I'll—I'll wring your neck for you!"

"I've got as much right to talk that way as your son has a right to call Mr. Potts crazy and a lunatic."

"I am not going to stand here and let you insult

me. I want you to keep still, otherwise I'll have the law on you."

"Dave, don't you think it would be best to take up with Mr. Poole's offer?" asked Caspar Potts, tremblingly.

"No, sir—at least not until you have asked some folks around Crumville what the land is worth."

"But—but——"

"Ben Basswood said there was some talk of running a trolley line from Haverfield through Crumville to Dixonville. If it went past here——"

"The boy is crazy," interrupted Aaron Poole. "The farm isn't worth a cent over what I am offering for it."

"I believe he is right, Dave."

"Then you'll take me up?" came quickly from Aaron Poole. He could scarcely suppress a smile of satisfaction.

"Don't do it," said Dave. "Wait at least until we can ask some folks in town about it. I can see Mr. Basswood to-morrow, and Mr. Jackson, and perhaps Mr. Gay, the lawyer."

"Boy, you have no right to interfere in this fashion," stormed Aaron Poole. "This is a piece of business between Mr. Potts and myself alone. Mr. Potts, you had better send the lad away. He doesn't know what he is talking about."

Caspar Potts gazed at the rich man, and then at Dave, in bewilderment.

"I—I don't know——" he began, hesitatingly.

"If everything is fair and square there will be no harm in waiting a few days," continued Dave. "The farm isn't going to run away."

"Surely that is true, Mr. Poole."

"I've got to go away to-morrow—down to New York on business," answered Aaron Poole. "I must close up this business without delay."

"Dave, what shall it be?" questioned Caspar Potts, pleadingly.

"I say, wait," came firmly from the youth.

"Then I'll wait," said the old man, and nothing would shake him from that determination. Aaron Poole argued for half an hour, and then strode from the cottage, shaking his head, angrily.

"I'll have the law on you," he cried, shrilly. "It's pay up or take the consequences. You might have had a hundred dollars extra; now you won't get a cent!" And then he jumped into his buggy and drove off.

As soon as his visitor was gone, Caspar Potts sank back in his chair in a state of collapse.

"Oh, Dave, I trust we have done what is best!" he groaned. "Perhaps—perhaps it would have been better to have sold out to him. A hundred dollars in cash is a good deal of money to us these days!"

"I'm satisfied of one thing," returned the boy. "He wouldn't offer that money unless the place

was worth it. Aaron Poole isn't giving away a cent. His face shows how grasping he is."

"Yes. But what shall we do next?"

"I'll go down to town after dinner and ask those men I mentioned what is best to do. I am sure Mr. Basswood will tell me the truth about the value of the land, and so will Mr. Jackson and Mr. Gay."

CHAPTER III

DAVE'S PRESENCE OF MIND

DAVE was as good as his word, and by one o'clock he entered Mr. Jackson's store. The proprietor, a portly man, greeted him pleasantly.

"More huckleberries, Dave?"

"Not to-day, Mr. Jackson. I came to ask you for a little information."

"Oh! What is it?"

"I guess you know our farm pretty well, don't you?"

"Why, yes; I've known that place for a good number of years. When I was a boy I used to go fishing in the brook back of the woods up there."

"What would you think the farm would bring if put up for sale?"

"Hum! That's a serious question to answer offhand. How many acres?"

"Eighty-six, and fifty cleared."

"How big is the house?"

"Four good rooms. Then we have a small barn, a cowshed, a poultry house, besides two cows, a horse, and all the tools."

"Are you trying to sell out?"

"Not exactly, but perhaps we'll have to. Now, how much ought the place to bring?"

"Two thousand dollars at least, I should say. Of course at a forced sale places don't bring so much."

"Well, don't you think it would bring more than thirteen hundred dollars?"

"It ought to. But once in a while a place goes for a song. Have you a purchaser?"

"Aaron Poole holds a mortgage for twelve hundred dollars, and he wants Mr. Potts to let him have it for the mortgage and a hundred dollars."

"Aaron Poole always was a close one for a bargain. You're not going to take him up?"

"I don't think so."

"Neither would I. Better risk an auction sale," answered Mr. Jackson, and turned away to wait on a customer that had entered.

From the store, Dave turned his footsteps toward Mr. Basswood's office, which was several blocks away. Ben's father had charge of several estates.

"Yes, Ben told me about your trouble," said Mr. Basswood, after greeting Dave. "I am sorry to hear of this. So Aaron Poole wants the place for the mortgage and a hundred, eh? I think I'd risk a sale first."

"That is just what Mr. Jackson said."

"Property around Crumville is constantly in-

creasing in value, and if that new trolley deal should go through it would certainly enhance the value of your farm very greatly. I am sorry I am not just now in a position to take up that mortgage for Mr. Potts. But I can tell you of somebody who might do so, and that is Mr. Wadsworth."

"You mean the gentleman who owns the jewelry works?"

"Exactly. He has plenty of cash and is constantly looking for good investments."

"I'd like to ask him, only I don't know him."

"I'll give you a note of introduction, Dave. You'll find him a nice man to meet," answered Mr. Basswood.

The note was written, and with the paper in his pocket the boy went on his way.

Having expected to call upon Mr. Basswood, and also Mr. Gay, the lawyer, Dave had dressed himself in his best suit of clothes, and polished his shoes. His outfit was far from a fine one, but it was clean, and there were no rents and no buttons missing.

Mr. Oliver Wadsworth lived in an elegant mansion standing at the head of one of the best side streets of Crumville. The grounds were tastefully laid out, with trees, shrubs, and flowers. In the rear was a fine stable, where the jewelry manufacturer kept his horses. Close by was an-

other building in which was kept the fine thirty horse-power automobile which had recently been purchased.

The Wadsworth family consisted of the gentleman and his wife and one child, a daughter named Jessie, aged about twelve. They had had a son, but the boy had been drowned in the river when ten years old. This loss grieved Mrs. Wadsworth very much, and she went out into society but rarely.

As Dave entered the wide-open gateway leading to the grounds he heard a peculiar chug-chug coming from in front of the building where the automobile was kept. The man in charge, who was also the Wadsworth coachman, was getting the machine in order for use on the road. He had promised to take Jessie out for a ride of fifteen or twenty miles, and the little miss was standing by, wraps in hand, waiting impatiently for the start.

"John, what makes you so long?" she asked, with a little pout. "You've been working now nearly half an hour."

"Can't help it, Miss Jessie," returned the hired man. "There seems to be something the matter with the flow of gasoline, or else this electric spark don't act right. I reckon I've got to tighten those screws a bit more."

"I thought automobiles ran easily," went on Jessie, shaking back her golden curls. "We might be miles away by this time."

"The machine will run well enough when once we get started," said the man, and then he walked to the rear of the building for a wrench.

How it happened nobody could exactly tell, but scarcely had the man left the side of the automobile when there came a small explosion, and a spout of flame shot from the side of the machine. This touched Jessie's dress, and caused her to give a wild and piercing scream of terror.

"Oh! oh! I'm on fire! Help me!"

"Fire! Fire!" yelled the hired man, and rushed off to get a pail of water.

The path from the gateway to the front piazza of the mansion ran in a quarter circle and in view of the automobile house. Thus Dave, coming along this path, saw the accident and saw Jessie in danger of being fatally burned.

For the moment the heart of the lad seemed to stop beating. Then he made a wild dash across the lawn.

"Oh, save me! Save me!" shrieked Jessie. "I am burning up!"

As he came forward Dave stripped himself of his jacket and in another instant he had the garment around the suffering girl. Then he threw her on the grass and rolled her over and over.

"Jessie! My Jessie!" came from a side porch of the mansion, and Mrs. Wadsworth appeared. "Save her!"

Dave did not reply, but continued to roll the girl over and over, at the same time beating out the flames as best he could with his hands. Then the hired man put in an appearance with a bucket of water.

"Use this," he said, and Dave dashed some in the girl's face and on her breast and arms. But the flames were out and the danger was over.

"Is she—is she——" began Mrs. Wadsworth, but could say no more.

"I don't think she is hurt very much," answered Dave.

He helped Jessie to a sitting position and then to her feet. She stared around wildly and rushed into her mother's arms.

"Oh, mamma!" she moaned, and then fainted.

"Shall we carry her into the house, mum?" asked the hired man.

"Yes," was the reply, and between the man and Dave they took Jessie into a sitting room, where she was placed on a sofa. It was seen that her left arm was slightly burned, near the elbow, but otherwise she was unharmed. Oil was applied, and then flour, and the hired man was rushed away to get a doctor. In the meantime the fire had died out, leaving the automobile but slightly damaged.

Before the doctor arrived Jessie came out of her swoon. She said the arm smarted greatly, but the physician soon made this feel fairly comfortable.

In the meantime Mr. Wadsworth, who had gone to the jewelry works, was also summoned.

"Thank God, she is safe!" murmured the gentleman, after seeing his daughter. "Had she been——" He could not finish, but had to turn away.

"It was this young man who saved her, Oliver," came from Mrs. Wadsworth. "At the risk of being burnt himself, he covered her with his jacket, rolled her on the damp grass, and put water on her."

"It was a brave thing to do," was Mr. Wadsworth's ready reply, and he shook Dave's hand warmly.

"Oh, I didn't do much," answered the boy, honestly. "You see, it was only last week I was reading an article on what to do in case a person's clothing took fire. It came in handy, didn't it?"

"It did, indeed." Mr. Wadsworth paused. "Let me see, didn't you come here to see me?"

"Yes, Mr. Wadsworth."

"I believe I have seen you before, but I cannot remember your name."

"My name is David Porter. I live with old Mr. Potts, up the Dixonville road. Here is a letter that Mr. Basswood gave me," and the youth handed over the communication.

"Ah! So you want to know something about the value of that farm, eh? And about the mort-

gage on it?" The jewelry manufacturer rubbed his chin reflectively. "What did Mr. Basswood say about it?"

"He said property around here was constantly increasing in value."

"The mortgage is now twelve hundred dollars?"

"Yes, sir, and Aaron Poole offered Mr. Potts only one hundred dollars over that amount. Mr. Jackson said he thought the place ought to be worth two thousand dollars."

"I see." Mr. Wadsworth looked at Dave curiously. "How is it you came about this? Are you a relative of Mrs. Potts?"

"No, sir. I am his bound boy."

"Oh! How long have you lived with him?"

"About six years."

"Has he much of a family?"

"No, sir; he is alone in the world, and he is very old and feeble now."

"I don't believe I know him. What is his first name?"

"Caspar."

Oliver Wadsworth looked up in astonishment.

"Caspar Potts. Why, that was the name of a professor who used to teach me history when I attended Vale College! But of course this farmer cannot be the same man."

"He can be!" cried Dave. "Mr. Potts was

once a college professor; but his health broke down and he gave it up and went to farming, for he had been brought up on a farm."

"This is wonderful, my lad. I liked Caspar Potts very much, and I often wondered what became of him. He was a very learned man, but decidedly peculiar in some of his ways."

"He is peculiar yet. Some folks think he is a bit out of his head, but I never would believe it."

"What a change for such a man! Does he seem to like farming?"

"Yes, sir. He says he is tired of the bustling outside world."

"I will come and see him to-morrow morning. If he is the same Caspar Potts who used to teach me I'll certainly do all I can for him, and I know certain other members of our old class will do the same. Pop Potts we called him, and we can't afford to let him drop out of sight and be forgotten."

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD PROFESSOR'S PUPIL

BEFORE Dave left the Wadsworth mansion the lady of the place insisted upon thanking him warmly for what he had done for her daughter. Jessie was also grateful and did what she could to show it.

"I shall never forget you, Dave Porter," she said, with a warm smile. "If it hadn't been for you I should have been burnt up!" And her pretty eyes filled with tears.

"I'm glad I was able to do it for you," was Dave's simple answer. He wanted to say more, but, somehow, the words would not come. He had always looked at Jessie Wadsworth as something of a fairy, far removed from such a country boy as himself. Now she seemed more of a fairy and more beautiful than ever.

When Dave reached home he found Caspar Potts anxiously awaiting his return.

"Mr. Wadsworth is coming to see us," said he. "He thinks you must have taught him when he went to Vale College."

"Did he go to old Vale!" cried Caspar Potts.

"I remember that I taught several Wadsworths during my time there."

"I had quite an adventure," went on Dave, and related what had happened to Jessie. "They thought I did something, but I guess it wasn't so much," he added.

On the following morning Dave rose early, and put the cottage in good order for the reception of their visitor. He also helped Caspar Potts to don his best suit of clothes.

"You must be the professor for to-day," he said, with a smile, and this pleased the old man greatly.

"I—I really think I could lecture again, Dave—if I only could get my strength back," said he. "But I'm too old—too old!" And he heaved a deep sigh.

Oliver Wadsworth drove up shortly after ten o'clock in his carriage, the automobile having been sent away for repairs. Caspar Potts and Dave went out on the porch to greet him.

"Professor Potts, sure enough!" cried the manufacturer, cheerily, as he shook hands. "Well, who would have dreamed of finding you buried in such a place as this!"

"It was a quiet, restful spot, and I needed quiet," answered the old man. "Come in, and make yourself at home, Mr. Wadsworth," and he led the way to the best apartment the cottage afforded.

"I wish I had known of this before, professor; I should have called and brought some of my classmates along. Don't you remember Jack Haswell and Dick Merrick?"

"Yes, yes!"

"They often come to see me, and they have asked about you more than once. And so you have turned farmer? This is truly wonderful!"

"It is what I like best, besides lecturing, Mr. Wadsworth. But I don't know that I am to keep my farm much longer, unless——"

"Unless you can make some arrangement to get rid of Aaron Poole, is that it?"

"It's about that mortgage, yes."

"Don't let that worry you, professor. I've got a little money to spare, and if you want to keep the farm I'll take up that mortgage, and we'll send Mr. Aaron Poole about his business."

At this announcement the face of the old man brightened wonderfully.

"It's very kind of you to do that. But the interest money—You see, I've been sick——"

"What interest do you pay now?"

"Six per cent."

"We'll make the interest on the new mortgage four per cent., and you can pay it as you feel able. I'll not press you."

"Oh, thank you!" Caspar Potts shook hands

with great fervor. "It is kind of you to remember your old professor in this way!" And two tears glistened in his feeble eyes.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll take a look over the farm with Dave," continued the manufacturer. "Perhaps I can suggest some improvements." He gave a light laugh, for he was no farmer. "We'll be back shortly."

Dave was willing enough to show Mr. Wadsworth over the farm, and the two walked out together. The manufacturer looked over that portion which faced the highway.

"You've got a good six hundred feet on both sides of the road," he said, measuring the distance with his eye. "They would certainly make fine town lots some day—after the trolley was established."

"Town lots!" ejaculated Dave.

"Certainly. Crumville is growing fast, and people will always settle along the line of a trolley. It's good property for Professor Potts to hold."

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Wadsworth, and doubly glad to know that you'll take up that mortgage. Mr. Potts couldn't get along with Mr. Aaron Poole at all."

"Poole is a hard man—we all know that. I suppose he thought he'd get this for a song, and then hold it for a big rise. Now, tell me truthfully,

if you can, Dave. Has the professor any ready money?"

"So far as I know, he has next to nothing, sir."

"Then I am going to pay that interest now due, and I'm going to leave a little purse with him besides. I am also going to communicate with some old classmates, so in the future, Professor Potts will be well cared for. I feel he deserves this."

"I think he does myself. He is a nice old gentleman."

"It was queer he should take you for his bound boy?"

"He wanted somebody; that was all there was to it. I did the best I could on the farm, and he paid me back by giving me a pretty fair education."

"Yes, I noticed that you didn't appear to be as ignorant as some of the country lads around here. You can be thankful you have received such instruction. Your learning may be very valuable to you in years to come."

"I know that. If I had my way I'd get all the education I could. But I guess I've got to stick to the farm, or else go at something else for a living."

"If you could do exactly as you pleased, what would you do?" asked Oliver Wadsworth, with increased interest.

"I'd fit myself for college," was the prompt an-

swer. "Even as it is, I'm going to do what I can."

"And after that?"

"I'd go to college and learn all I could."

"And then what, Dave?"

"Then I'd like to travel, if I could afford it, to broaden my mind, as the professor puts it, and after that I'd go in for some profession like law or civil engineering. I was reading the other day of a young fellow who was a civil engineer and was laying out railroads through the mountains of Mexico. That work would suit me exactly." Dave's face began to glow with enthusiasm. "I just wish I had the chance to go ahead! I'm going to make the chance, too,—if I can," he added, stoutly.

The outburst interested Oliver Wadsworth more than he was willing to admit. Then of a sudden a pang shot through his heart, as he remembered the son he had lost through drowning. He looked at Dave and fancied he could trace a resemblance between the two. His dead boy had had that same clean-cut chin, and those same honest, earnest eyes.

"We'll have to see about this later," he said, in a husky voice. "Let us look over the rest of the farm."

In ten minutes more they returned to the house, and there the manufacturer explained to Caspar Potts just what he intended to do. The old pro-

fessor was grateful, and when fifty dollars in cash was placed on the table before him, his eyes filled with tears of joy.

"Take that and use it as you need it," said Oliver Wadsworth. "And if you find that you need more, do not hesitate to let me know. And when Aaron Poole comes again, send him to me."

"It's very good of you to do this, Mr. Wadsworth," said Dave. "I must thank you, too, for it helps me out as well as Mr. Potts."

"I haven't got around to helping you yet, Dave," said Oliver Wadsworth, with a quiet smile. "I must go out of town to-day, but to-morrow I want you to come and take dinner with us, at six o'clock. It's my wife's invitation as well as my own. How about you, professor? Will you come too? If so, I'll send my carriage for you."

"If I—I am not too old—and too feeble, Mr. Wadsworth——"

"Nonsense! You come along, and we'll take care of you. The carriage will be here at five, sharp. Good-bye," and then the manufacturer hurried away to keep another engagement.

"He's what I call a real gentleman," cried Dave, when he and the old man were alone. "Isn't that so, professor?"

"It's like a dream to me, Dave. I'm afraid I'll wake up and find it untrue."

"It's real enough. I am glad you are out of Aaron Poole's clutches."

"So am I," added Caspar Potts.

After this talk Dave went to work with a much lighter heart. He felt that Oliver Wadsworth would keep his word, so there would be no further worry concerning the mortgage. He resolved to do all he possibly could to make the farm pay.

That afternoon, while on an errand to Crumville, he passed Aaron Poole in his buggy.

"Hello, there, young man," cried the rich man. "Anything new?" And he pulled up his horse.

"There is, Mr. Poole," answered Dave, quietly.

"Is Caspar Potts going to let me have the farm?"

"No, sir. He has placed the matter in the hands of Mr. Oliver Wadsworth."

"Oliver Wadsworth?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Wadsworth will pay the interest money, and when the mortgage falls due he will take it off your hands."

At this announcement Aaron Poole's face took on a sour look.

"Wadsworth will get stuck," he muttered. "He'll never see his money again."

"He thinks the farm a good investment. When the trolley goes through, the land will rapidly increase in value."

"Humph! that remains to be seen. So Caspar Potts refuses absolutely to sell to me?"

"Yes, and he wants you to see Mr. Wadsworth about the mortgage and interest money."

"Very well, I'll do it," snapped Aaron Poole. "This is what I get for helping Caspar Potts out of a hole when he was in it."

"You got six per cent. for your money, Mr. Poole."

"Which I was legally entitled to."

"That is true, but Mr. Wadsworth is going to charge only four per cent."

"He's a fool to take a mortgage at four per cent.," snorted Aaron Poole. "I thought he was a sharper business man than that."

"I fancy he knows what he is doing."

"Oh, you needn't complain—you are getting the best of the deal. But I guess Oliver Wadsworth will be sorry of his bargain before he gets through with it," and with this attempt at a parting shot Aaron Poole whipped up his horse and drove away.

CHAPTER V

A SURPRISE FOR DAVE

It must be confessed that Dave thought a good deal about the proposed dinner at the Wadsworth mansion. He had dined out but a few times in his life, and never at such an elegant home as he knew this to be. He spent considerable time in brushing up his best shoes and his best hat, and in mending the suit he was to wear.

"We'll cut a sorry figure, I am afraid," sighed Caspar Potts, as he surveyed his rusty black frock coat, a relic of other days.

"Never mind, Mr. Wadsworth wanted us, and we'll go as best we can," said Dave, cheerily.

At the appointed time the Wadsworth carriage drove over to the farm and Caspar Potts and Dave got in. The driver was John, the man who had been working on the automobile at the time of the accident. He grinned broadly at the youth.

"How is the automobile?" asked Dave, as they sped along the road.

"Still at the shop," was the reply. "And it may stay there, too, for the present, for nobody wants to ride in it yet for fear of being blown up."

"And how is Miss Jessie?"

"Doing finely, so the doctor says. She is up and around, with her arm in a sling. It was you did a fine act to save her from being burnt," added the coachman.

When they drove up the whole Wadsworth family came out on the veranda to greet them. The manufacturer himself assisted Caspar Potts to alight. Jessie lost no time in approaching Dave and taking his hand.

"I want to thank you," she began, and then her voice choked a little.

"Don't you do it, please," said the boy. "It's all right. I'm glad I had the chance."

"You were so brave!"

"Oh, I didn't do so much! Anybody could have done it."

"I shall never forget it, Dave." And Jessie gave his hand a tight squeeze that made him blush. Somehow, Dave felt that that was the happiest moment he had ever yet experienced.

They entered the elegant parlor, and it was not long before dinner was announced. The old professor sat on Mr. Wadsworth's right, and Dave on his left. Next to Dave sat Jessie, while the lady of the mansion occupied the other end of the board. As Jessie could use but one hand, her mother prepared most of the food for her.

At first the meal progressed stiffly, but both Mr.

and Mrs. Wadsworth had tact, and by the time soup was finished all were chatting pleasantly. The gentleman of the house interested the old professor with memories of college days, while Mrs. Wadsworth and Jessie asked Dave about himself and about what he was doing on the farm, and then told something about themselves.

" I don't know that I shall ever care to ride in that automobile," said Jessie; " although papa says he will have it mended so that there will be no further trouble."

" My husband tells me that you would like to obtain a good education," said Mrs. Wadsworth to Dave, after a pause in the conversation. " I think that is the proper ambition for any lad."

" Yes, ma'am, I'd like first-rate to go through college and become something worth while," was the quick reply.

" Mr. Wadsworth will have something to say on that point later on," continued Mrs. Wadsworth.

When dinner was over the lady of the house excused herself for the time being, and withdrew, taking her daughter with her. Mr. Wadsworth led his visitors to the library, where he offered the old professor a cigar and lit one himself.

" Of course you don't smoke," he said to Dave.

" No, sir," was the prompt answer.

" Nor drink? "

"No, sir."

"I am glad to hear it, Dave. Well now, to get to business, as we business men say. I've got a proposition to lay before both of you, and I wish you to consider it carefully."

"I am willing to listen to anything you have to say, Mr. Wadsworth," answered the old professor, promptly.

"And so am I," added Dave.

There was a pause, during which Oliver Wadsworth looked keenly at Dave.

"This proposition concerns Dave more than it does you, professor," he said, at length. "I am afraid it will involve a sacrifice on your part, for Dave's benefit."

"I am willing to do what I can for the boy. He has been very good to me—and so have you been good."

"Dave did a great deal for my daughter the other day, and I want to do something for him in return. Now don't interrupt," went on the gentleman as the boy started to speak. "He did a great deal, and it was very noble in him. But that isn't all. Some years ago I had a son, but he was drowned in the river. I thought the world of my boy. Dave reminds me strongly of him,—his general manner is much the same. I should like to do something for Dave for the sake of my son's memory,—since I now have no boy of my own."

Mr. Wadsworth heaved a long sigh, and for the moment there was silence. Dave was wondering what was coming.

"The boy tells me that he would like to obtain a thorough education," resumed the manufacturer. "I was going to give my son the best of educations. Now I am thinking of doing as much by this boy. What do you think of it, professor?"

"Grand! grand!" cried Caspar Potts, enthusiastically. "You are more than kind, Mr. Wadsworth! It will be the making of Dave!"

"And what do you say, Dave?"

"I—I don't know what to say," was the stammered-out answer. "Do you mean that you will send me to school and then to college?"

"That is exactly what I do mean, my lad. You will need to go to a first-class preparatory school, and then, if you pass the required examination, you can go to college."

"He'll pass the examination," burst in Caspar Potts. "He has it in him! I know! Mr. Wadsworth, you are a gentleman, sir, after my own heart. This is grand, magnificent!" and the old professor glowed with enthusiasm.

"Does it strike you favorably, Dave?"

"Why, sir, I—I really don't deserve this," said the boy. "It's too much! Why, I'm almost a stranger to you!"

"Let me be the judge of that, lad. Remember,

you did a great deal when you saved Jessie from burning to death."

"Yes, but—but it will cost a heap of money, Mr. Wadsworth."

"Not such a tremendous sum—for one situated like myself. I have taken a strong liking to you, and—I hope you like me?"

"I do, sir, very much!" cried Dave, heartily.

"And what of my offer? Do you wish to accept?"

"Yes, sir, but I don't see how I can do it," and the boy's face fell suddenly.

"Why not?" came from both the manufacturer and Caspar Potts simultaneously.

"I can't leave Mr. Potts. It wouldn't be right."

"It's good of you to say that, Dave, but I—I—can get along alone, somehow," faltered the old professor. "You mustn't allow this opportunity to slip because of me."

"I haven't finished with my proposition yet," went on Oliver Wadsworth. "If Dave goes to school and then to college I want you, professor, to come here and live under our roof. You are too old to work on the farm. I think we can rent the place out to somebody until such time as the land becomes ripe for improvement."

"I to live here!" gasped Caspar Potts.

"Yes. You see, by such an arrangement we

shall both hold an interest in Dave. You shall have your own room, and come and go as you please. If you wish to do anything, you can help me to get my library into shape, and help me, occasionally, with my correspondence."

"This library!" Caspar Potts gazed fondly at the many volumes. "That would not be work; it would be a rare pleasure."

"And I believe you have a great fondness for flowers and shrubs."

"Yes."

"Then you might also assist William, my gardener, to take care of the plants in the conservatory and the greenhouse."

"That would be another pleasure."

"Then you will come?"

"Come? Yes, yes! You are too good, Mr. Wadsworth."

"Then it's settled, and Dave can go to school as planned, eh, Dave?" This with a bright smile.

"I guess I must be dreaming!" came from the boy. "Won't you please pinch me! This almost knocks me flat!"

"Never mind; you'll get over it in time."

"But to go to a first-class school and to college! Mr. Wadsworth, I'll do my best, and if I ever get the chance to pay you back, I'll do it,—and with interest too!" And Dave's face showed that he meant every word he uttered.

"It will be pay enough to see you make something of yourself, Dave."

"Where did you think of sending him first?" questioned Caspar Potts.

"I was going to send my son to Oak Hall, located back of the village of Oakdale, in the State of Massachusetts. It is an institution presided over by Dr. Hasmer Clay. Perhaps you remember him. He was in our class for a short time."

"Ah, yes, I remember him. He wrote a short history of the Colonization of New England, and another history of the New England Indians."

"That's the man. I felt that I could trust my son in his care, and so I feel it would be a good place for Dave. Oak Hall prepares its students for any of the leading colleges," added Oliver Wadsworth.

"It is a boarding school, then?" said Dave.

"Yes. The term begins on the first Monday in September, so you will have ample time here in which to get ready for school."

"Is it a large place, may I ask?"

"I believe the school accommodates about a hundred pupils. I was up there once and thought it delightfully situated, on a small hill, with a river behind it, at the bottom of a great playground. The place takes its name from the great number of oaks which grow in that vicinity. I'll write a letter to Dr. Clay to-morrow, telling him that I am

going to send you, and I'll ask him for one of his circulars. Then you'll learn all you want to know about the place."

"Thank you; I'd like to know something about where I am going."

"When the proper time comes, I'll give you a complete outfit for school, and I shall also provide you with necessary spending money," continued Oliver Wadsworth. "I shall not give you too much, because I don't think it is good for any boy."

"I don't want a cent more than I need," answered Dave, earnestly. "I don't want you to spend too much on me. But, oh, Mr. Wadsworth, you *are* good, no two ways about it."

After this, the matter was talked over for fully an hour longer. Mrs. Wadsworth joined in the discussion and so did Jessie.

"I am glad you have accepted my husband's offer," said the lady to Dave.

"I don't see how anybody could refuse," returned the boy. "I can hardly believe it yet! I thought I'd have to stick to the farm for years!"

"Mind, I want you to come out at the top of the class," put in Jessie. "If you'll do that, I'll treat you like a real brother."

"I'll do my best," answered Dave, soberly.

CHAPTER VI

OFF FOR OAK HALL

It soon became noised around Crumville that Oliver Wadsworth had taken in old Caspar Potts to live with him, and that the rich manufacturer was going to send Dave to a boarding school.

"I must congratulate you on your luck," said Ben Basswood to Dave, when they met. "Going to a first-class school will be fine, and you ought to have lots of fun."

"I'm going to study, not for the fun of it, Ben."

"Oh, you know what I mean. Of course you'll study your lessons. But at such a school they have baseball and football, and a gymnasium, and all that. I wish I was going."

"Why can't you go? I'd like to have somebody there that I knew."

"Can't do it—at least not for the present. But perhaps father will let me go later. And, Dave, they are saying that you were a regular hero, saving Jessie Wadsworth's life at the risk of your own. Didn't you get burnt at all?"

"Got a few blisters on the palm of my hand, that's all. Anybody could have done as much."

"Yes, but everybody wouldn't think to act so quickly. The hired man went for a pail of water, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"And Jessie might have burnt up while he was getting it. I reckon you deserve what you are receiving, Dave," concluded Ben.

The next week was a busy one for Dave, who worked on the farm from sunrise to sunset, getting everything in proper shape for another tenant. In the meantime Caspar Potts packed up his few belongings and had them transferred to the Wadsworth residence. Later on a farmer was found to take the farm, at a yearly rental which was satisfactory to all concerned.

Having been referred to Mr. Wadsworth, Aaron Poole called on the manufacturer for his interest money, and the upshot of the visit was that Oliver Wadsworth took over the mortgage on the farm.

"You won't make anything on that deal, Wadsworth," said Aaron Poole, after the transaction had come to an end.

"I do not expect to make anything," was the quiet answer. "But I fancy Professor Potts will make something, later on."

"Maybe he will and maybe he won't," was Aaron Poole's tart reply, and then, as there was nothing more to say, he withdrew.

At the end of a week a letter and a circular were received from Dr. Hasmer Clay. In the letter the master of Oak Hall stated that he would be pleased to receive Mr. Wadsworth's protégé as a pupil, and the circular told about the institution and the course of study.

"That must certainly be a fine place," was Dave's comment, after reading the circular and looking at the several pictures which it contained.

"What about the courses of study?" asked Oliver Wadsworth of Caspar Potts.

"Excellent, sir. I don't know that they could be improved upon. I fancy Dave will be able to enter the class next to the highest, and if so it will not be long before he will be ready to go to college."

It was decided that Dave needed a little "brushing up" in one or two studies, and as soon as he felt strong enough to do so, Caspar Potts gave him daily instruction. He had always been a good pupil and his progress was, therefore, rapid.

When Dave left the farm he was given a comfortable room on the second story of the Wadsworth mansion. It was prettily furnished, and Jessie made for him a table scarf which he admired greatly. He was also given some clothing and other necessities by Mr. Wadsworth, and when dressed up made as neat and handsome an appearance as any lad in Crumville.

"Now, you are going to be a regular member of the family," said Jessie, as she gave him a warm smile.

"I'm afraid yet that it is all a dream," said Dave, with a little laugh. "I can't really make myself believe that it's all true."

"You'll know it's true when you get to grinding away at your books."

"Oh, that won't bother me," answered Dave, with a smile.

One day when Dave was on an errand to the post office he met Nat Poole, the lordly son of the man who had held the mortgage on the farm. The young fellow was loudly dressed, and was smoking a cigarette.

"Say, you're Dave Porter, ain't you?" questioned Nat Poole, as he strode up to Dave.

"I am, and I believe you are Nat Poole," was the quiet answer.

"You've struck it rich since you moved to Wadsworth's place," sneered Nat Poole.

"I have struck it rich, for which I am thankful."

"Wadsworth must be a softy to take you in."

"I'd like to know what business it is of yours," retorted Dave.

"Humph! Can't I say what I think?"

"You say too much."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You came over to the farm on an errand for

your father and you insulted Mr. Potts—said he was a lunatic and all that. I don't like that sort of talk."

"I only told the truth."

"Mr. Potts is no more crazy than you are."

"We have a difference of opinion on that point."

"It was a mean thing to do, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for doing it," went on Dave.

"Look here! I won't have you talking to me in this fashion!" roared Nat. "I'm a gentleman, I am, and I want you to know it!"

"No gentleman would treat an old man like that."

Dave had scarcely spoken when Nat Poole stepped forward and caught him by the coat collar.

"You take care!" he blustered.

"Let go of me, Nat Poole," was the quiet but firm answer. "Let go, do you hear?"

"I'll let go when I choose."

"If you don't let go I'll knock you down."

Dave's eyes were blazing, and his lips were pressed tightly together. He doubled up his right fist, and Nat Poole released his hold without delay.

"I won't fight with such a low fellow as you," muttered the rich youth.

"I am not as low a fellow as you are. I know how to behave myself."

"Humph! You're nothing but a poorhouse boy."

At these words Dave's face reddened. Only once, years before, had he been insulted like this, but he had never forgotten it. It had made him run away, wild with a grief and a rage that he could not master.

"You—you——" he began, but did not finish. He might have hit the rich boy, but Nat Poole retreated quickly.

"Don't you dare to talk to me like that again!" Dave went on, hotly. "Don't you dare! If you do, you'll be sorry as long as you live!" He came after Nat again, but the other youth retreated still further.

"Guess you don't like the truth," muttered the rich boy, and then left the post office and disappeared.

One man had heard the quarrel, the postmaster's assistant. He gazed at Dave admiringly.

"You served him properly," said he. "He ought to have been knocked down."

"I suppose because he is rich he thinks he can say anything," returned Dave, rather bitterly.

"Oh, you mustn't mind such cads, Dave. I understand Nat is worrying his old man a good deal. He's wanting spending money all the time, and he blows it in on cigarettes, pool playing, and theaters."

"It's a wonder his father will allow it."

"Somebody told me he was going to send Nat to a boarding school—some strict place where he would have to toe the chalk mark. It's what that high-flyer needs."

"Perhaps; but if he gets into a wild set, it may make him wilder than ever."

"That is true."

"I am going to a boarding school soon," continued Dave. "It's a fine institution in Massachusetts called Oak Hall."

"You're in luck. I suppose Mr. Wadsworth is sending you."

"Yes."

"He's the most public-spirited man in Crumville. He pays fine wages, and all his employees think the world of him. He has furnished them with a free reading room, and a gymnasium, and lots of other things. I wish we had more men like him," added the postmaster's assistant.

"Where is Mr. Poole going to send Nat?"

"I don't know. They had several places in mind, I believe."

After that the days flew by swiftly. Dave applied himself to his studies, and a week before the time came to depart for Oak Hall, Caspar Potts announced to Mr. Wadsworth that the youth was fully competent to enter the next to the highest class at the academy.

At last came the day when Dave was to leave. His trunk had been packed and sent off the day before, and he had his railroad ticket and ten dollars tucked away in his pocket. Mrs. Wadsworth had presented him with a neat silver watch, and Jessie had added a chain and locket, the latter with his monogram engraved upon it. He wished he had her picture in the locket, but he did not have the courage to ask for it.

Mr. Wadsworth took him to the depot, accompanied by Caspar Potts, and at the station they fell in with Ben Basswood.

"I thought I'd come to bid you good-bye," said Ben. "I can tell you, I wish I was going too."

"You must get to Oak Hall somehow, Ben," returned Dave.

Now that he was really starting out it must be confessed that Dave felt just a bit queer. Since coming to Crumville he had never been many miles from home, nor among those who were utter strangers to him.

"I hope you don't get homesick, Dave," said Caspar Potts, kindly. "If you do, fight it off right at the start—don't brood over it."

"We'll write to you from time to time," added Oliver Wadsworth, "and you must write in return."

"I'll certainly do that, Mr. Wadsworth."

"I'll write too," added Ben Basswood, "and I want you to tell me just what kind of a school it is, Dave."

The train soon rolled into the station, and with a handshaking all around, Dave climbed on board. The car was only half filled, so he found a whole seat, and sat down by the open window. Then he waved those on the platform a parting adieu, and the train rolled away.

"And now for Oak Hall," murmured the boy, and heaved a little sigh, he could not tell exactly why. He felt as if he was entering another world, and so he was,—the world of school—with all its ups and downs, its friendships and its enmities, its studies and its sports—a world in which he was to fight a hard battle from start to finish, and one in which certain affairs were to happen which would fill him with perplexity and astonishment.

CHAPTER VII

A STRANGER AND HIS VALISE

DAVE had brought with him a magazine to read, but for the present he preferred to look out of the wide-open window at the scenery as it appeared to rush past. Crumville was soon lost in the distance, and they crossed the river running to the Sound, and then began to climb a long hill dotted with farms in a high state of cultivation. Next came a wood, and beyond this was a small town where the train made its next stop.

The seat across the aisle from the youth was vacant, and presently this was taken by a sleek-looking individual dressed in a suit of gray and wearing a mourning band on his derby hat. The stranger carried a good-sized valise, which he stowed on the seat beside him with care.

"Rather warm," he remarked, looking at the boy with a smile on his shrewd face.

"It is," returned Dave, politely. For some reason he did not fancy the appearance of the newcomer.

"It's hot work carrying a heavy valise," went

on the stranger. "Had to tramp half around town with it, too."

To this Dave made no reply, and for several minutes there was silence. The stranger gazed out of the window anxiously, and looking in the direction Dave noticed a white mansion standing on a small rise of ground. The place was well-kept, as if belonging to a family of means. As the boy looked at the place he saw a man come running out of the front gate and look up and down the road, as if in strong excitement.

"Something is wrong there," thought Dave. "Perhaps the place is on fire." But before he could see more the train dashed into a wood, and the mansion was left behind.

"Say, friend, I think I'll go and have a smoke," said the stranger, when the train was clear of the woods again. "Will you keep an eye on my valise while I am in the smoker? It's too heavy to carry back and forth."

"I'll look after it as long as I am on the train," answered Dave, seeing no reason to refuse the request.

"How far do you go?"

"To Oakdale Junction."

"Do you belong there?"

"No, sir, I am going to Oakdale, to attend a boarding school there."

"Ah, I see. Well, I'll be back before we reach

the junction." And thus speaking the stranger left the car.

As was but natural, Dave gazed at the valise curiously and wondered what it could contain that made it so heavy. One end of the bag was marked "W. F. F., New York."

"Maybe he is a traveler for a hardware house," thought the youth. "Their goods are all heavy. But why should he carry his samples around Hemson? I don't think there are half a dozen stores in the whole place. Or maybe he's a book agent."

The best part of half an hour passed and the stranger did not come back. Then came a sudden sharp jerk of the train which sent the man's valise to the floor of the car with a crash.

"Something must have broken that time," thought Dave, and getting up he took the bag and restored it to its original position. One of the clasps had become undone, and through a slit in the valise he caught sight of something that shone like gold.

"Hello, he must have some kind of wore in this valise," reasoned Dave. "Gold-plated ware perhaps. Maybe he is selling such stuff on the installment plan." A drummer had once visited the farm with silver-ware, which he wished to sell for a certain sum down and so much per week thereafter.

Ten minutes more passed and the train came to a halt at a town of considerable importance. Just ahead, on the track, a freight car, running into a switch, had been derailed, and it was announced that the train would be held up an hour, if not longer.

"This is beastly luck!" exclaimed the stranger, as he came back from the smoker. "A whole hour to wait, and just because a freight car is off the track. The management ought to be indicted!"

"Your bag fell to the floor a while ago," said Dave. "I picked it up. I hope nothing was broken."

"So do I. Well, I'm not going to stay here all day, even if the grip is heavy," went on the stranger. And he walked from the car, lugging his valise with him.

Not caring to remain seated for a full hour, Dave followed the man to the platform, and saw him disappear in the vicinity of a hotel near the railroad. Then the boy walked up past the engine to look at the derailed freight car.

A gang of men were working slowly, and so little was being done that the youth soon tired of looking on. He took a walk around the square and gazed into the hotel the stranger had entered. The man was at the bar, partaking freely of some strong liquor.

"Have a drink, friend!" he called out, on catching sight of the boy.

"No, thank you," answered Dave, coldly.

"Oh, yes, do. I owe you one for watching my bag for me."

"Thanks, but I don't drink," came from Dave, and he sauntered on.

"Must be one of those temperance chaps you hear about," said the traveler to the barkeeper.

"Ah, those scrubs make me weary," sneered the fellow behind the bar. "They are too stingy to drink."

From the square Dave sauntered back to the depot, and presently found himself close to the telegraph office. As he came up he saw the telegraph operator arise with a message in his hand, and beckon to a policeman standing near.

"Say, Jackson, here is news from Hemson," said the operator to the officer of the law. "A house was robbed up there this morning, and they want the police along the line to watch out for the thief. They think he may be on the train that is stalled here."

"Do they say how he looks?" asked the policeman.

"No, excepting that he had on a dark-gray suit, and carried a big valise."

"Humph! how is a man to catch anybody on such a description? Hundreds of men wear gray

and carry valises," grumbled the officer of the law. "I'll report it, though," he added, taking the telegram.

Dave listened to the conversation with deep interest. As the policeman took the telegram he approached the officer.

"Excuse me, but do you know what that thief stole?" he questioned, in a low voice.

The policeman stared, and gazed at him sharply.

"What do you want to know for?"

"I heard what the telegraph operator said. I was on that train which is delayed, and I saw a man on board who was dressed in a suit of gray. He had a valise which was so heavy he could scarcely carry it. One end bulged open, and I saw something in it which looked like gold plate."

"Say, is that true?" burst out the policeman. "This telegram says some gold- and silver-ware were taken, also some diamond rings. It was the summer home of Senator Morr—a fine old place that belonged once to the senator's grandfather."

"Then I shouldn't be surprised if the man I saw was the thief!" burst out Dave, excitedly. "He got on the train at Hemson."

"Where is he now?"

"At the barroom of yonder hotel." The youth pointed out the place. "He wanted me to drink with him, but I wouldn't do it." And then Dave

told of how the valise had dropped from the seat and how he had come to get a peep inside.

"I guess you have spotted the right man," said the policeman. "But I'd better tell the chief of this, first."

"Where is he? The man may get away if you delay."

"The station house is right around the corner."

"Supposing I go and watch the man while you tell your chief?" suggested Dave.

"Very well. If he tries to get away, run to the station house and report."

So it was agreed, and a moment later Dave hurried once more towards the hotel. He found the stranger leaning on the bar, talking earnestly to the one who had served him with drinks. The valise rested on a side table.

"Hullo!" cried the man. "Do you know when our train moves?"

"Not yet a while," answered Dave.

"I've got to get out of town, somehow," went on the stranger. "I can't afford to stay here all day."

"Maybe you'd like to walk."

"That's a good joke. Don't you know that the roads around here are beastly?"

"Perhaps you can hire an automobile," went on Dave, talking merely for the purpose of killing time.

"Say, that's a scheme! Wonder if there are any autos to let around here?"

"You'll find a garage two blocks up the street," said the barkeeper. "I think they have one or two they hire out by the hour."

"I want to get over to Hartford by to-night," said the man with the heavy valise. "I'll go and see what they've got."

He took up his bag, and left the hotel, walking slowly in the direction that had been pointed out. He had nearly reached the automobile establishment when he noticed that Dave was following him.

"Want to come along to Hartford?" he asked, but not in a pleasant tone.

"No, I thought I'd see if you managed to get an automobile. I'm going on to Oakdale Junction, as I told you before."

"Oh, yes, I remember. You said you were going to a boarding school at Oakdale. What's the name of the place?"

"Oak Hall."

"And what's your name?"

"Dave Porter. What's yours?"

"Mine? My name is——" the man seemed to hesitate, "Peter Snodgrass. I'm from Pittsburg."

"Peter Snodgrass," thought Dave. "That doesn't square with the initials, W. F. F., that are on that valise."

In a moment more the automobile establishment was reached, and the man who had given his name as Peter Snodgrass walked inside. Looking behind him, Dave saw the policeman approaching rapidly, accompanied by his chief, also in uniform.

"Where is he?" asked the policeman, and then continued to his superior: "This is the lad, chief."

"He just went in here to see if he couldn't hire an automobile," answered Dave.

"Humph! wants to get out of town in a hurry," muttered the chief of police. "It certainly won't do any harm to detain him on suspicion."

All three entered the automobile establishment, and the chief walked up to the man with the valise and tapped him on the shoulder.

"We want you," he said, in a low, hard tone.

The man who had given his name as Peter Snodgrass jumped about a foot. Then he gazed at the guardians of the law in alarm.

"Hang the luck! I reckon the game is up!" he cried, and as quick as a flash he dropped his valise, ran to the open window of the automobile establishment, and leaping outside, disappeared from view.

CHAPTER VIII

DAVE MAKES A NEW FRIEND

"He has gone!" gasped Dave. The movement had come so unexpectedly that for the instant he was dazed.

"After him!" cried the chief of police, and ran for the window, while the other officer ran outside.

Dave followed to the street, and then ran into an alleyway leading to the rear of the automobile establishment. He was just in time to see the escaping individual turning a corner beyond. Then the man leaped a fence and made for a freight yard a short distance further away.

"Where is he?" asked the policeman, coming up, followed by the chief.

"Gone among those freight cars," answered the youth.

All leaped the fence, and scattered among the cars. But the fleeing man had gained on them and it was impossible to locate him.

"I'll go back and take care of that valise," said the chief of police. "Jackson, you had better continue the hunt."

"Yes, sir."

"You can come with me," went on the head officer, to Dave, and both walked back to the automobile establishment. Here they found the proprietor of the place, full of curiosity over what had occurred.

"A thief, eh?" said he. "And this is his booty," and he pointed to the valise.

"We'll soon make sure," said the chief, and he pried the bag open. A quantity of silver and of gold-plated ware was exposed to view. Much of the ware had a fancy M engraved upon it.

"This is Senator Morr's stuff, sure enough," said the chief. "I hope we have the whole of it."

"Perhaps the table ware is here," answered Dave. "But didn't he take some other things—diamond rings?"

"He did, but they are not here."

"Then he must still have them."

Between them, the chief and Dave carried the heavy valise to the station house. Then another policeman was summoned, and sent out to aid Jackson in his attempt to round up the escaped criminal.

"I'll have to ask you to stay here as a witness against that fellow," said the chief to Dave. "It was shrewd of you to expose him as you did."

"How long will I have to stay here?"

"That will depend. I'll send word to Senator Morr at once."

The matter was talked over, and a telegram was sent to the senator. This had hardly been done when a youth of about Dave's age came into the station house.

"I want to know if it's true that our house at Hemson has been robbed," he said, somewhat excitedly.

"Who are you?" asked the chief.

"I am Roger Morr, the son of Senator Morr."

"It is true, the house was robbed. We have just recovered this valise full of stuff."

"Well, I never!" cried Roger Morr. "How did it all happen?"

The senator's son was told and he turned quickly to Dave with a warm smile on his handsome face.

"That was clever of you," he said, with an emphatic nod. "You caught him on the fly, didn't you?"

"Yes, but he got away," answered Dave. He smiled, too, for there was something about the other boy that pleased him, he was so frank and open.

"What else did he get?"

"Some diamond rings, I believe. We are not sure yet."

"I hope those policemen run the rascal down," went on Roger Morr. "Such a fellow ought to serve a term in prison."

"They ought to be able to locate him. I don't

see how he can get out of town when the railroad is blocked."

"That's so. I was on that train that is stalled, too. Where were you bound? I was going to Oakdale Junction."

"I was going there too. I am bound for Oak Hall, a boarding school located back of Oakdale."

Roger Morr opened his eyes widely and stared at Dave.

"Oak Hall! Just my destination. You must be a new student. I don't remember seeing you last season."

"Do you go to Oak Hall?" queried Dave, with equal interest. "I am glad to meet you."

"I suppose there will be a lot of new fellows there this season," continued Roger Morr. "Where did you say you came from?"

"Crumville."

"Do you know Ben Basswood?"

"Yes, indeed. He is one of my closest friends."

"I know him quite well, and Sid Parsons, too," continued the senator's son. "Wasn't it queer we should fall in with one another in this fashion? Do you know anybody at the Hall?"

"Not a soul."

"Then I'll have to introduce you. You'll find that we have a rattling good lot of fellows there, and a few who are not so good, too," added Roger. "Do you play football?"

"No, yet I think I might learn. But I am going to the academy to get an education," went on Dave, soberly.

"Of course—we all go for that, and let me tell you right now that I don't believe in shirking my studies. But I love football and baseball, too, and also rowing."

"I like baseball, although I never got much chance to play. You see, I'm from a farm."

"A farm? You don't look much like a—a farmer's boy," and the senator's son gazed at Dave critically.

"I lived on a farm for years, but now I live with Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, who owns the jewelry works at Crumville."

"Oh, yes, I've heard father speak of him. What class do you expect to enter—or don't you know."

"I hope to get in the next to the graduating class."

"That's the very one I am in." The senator's son gazed at Dave again. "Do you think you can make it? I hope you can. But let me tell you, Dr. Clay is very particular. He shows no favors to anybody."

"I don't expect any favors. I have been studying hard. You see, I used to live with an elderly man who was once a college professor, and he gave me lessons every day, winter and summer.

Both Professor Potts and myself now live with Mr. Wadsworth."

"I see. Then perhaps you'll get in our class, and that will be jolly," added Roger Morr.

It was now almost noon, and after a little more conversation the senator's son invited Dave to dine with him.

"I was going to dine at Oakdale Junction," said Dave.

"Oh, come with me," insisted Roger. "I don't want to eat alone—I never do if I can help it. Besides, I want to show you that I appreciate what you have done for our folks. Just wait till father gets here, I guess he'll want to do something, too."

"I wish we could find that thief."

"Yes, but where are we to look for him? He'll make the best possible use of his time to get away," added Roger.

He led the way to a first-class restaurant, and there ordered an elaborate meal. It was more than Dave expected and he was frank to say so.

"Don't worry, you won't get such a spread when you get to Oak Hall," answered Roger. "They set a substantial table, but the doctor doesn't believe in ruining a pupil's digestion."

"Is the doctor a nice man?"

"One of the best you ever met. All the better class of boys like him very much."

"I thought he didn't have any boys that weren't good."

"Oh, they all come from pretty good families, but two or three of them try to fly pretty high, and one or two are regular bullies."

"I don't think I'll let anybody bully me," answered Dave, shortly.

"The worst bully at the Hall is Gus Plum. He's pretty rich, and he has an idea he can lord it over nearly everybody. I have never run up against him very much, but some of the others have. You want to look out for him."

"I shall."

"There is another boy you want to look out for too, and that's Chip Macklin. He's a little fellow and a regular sneak. He toadies to Gus Plum all the time, and he'll get you into trouble if you don't take care."

"It's a wonder somebody doesn't give the sneak a thrashing."

"Oh, he has been thrashed half a dozen times, and once the boys ducked him in the river, in the winter time, but it never did any good; Chip was worse after it than before. I guess more than three-quarters of the boys wish Gus Plum and Chip Macklin would leave the school."

By this time the dinner was being served, and both boys fell to eating with such appetites as growing lads usually possess. There were ox-tail soup,

cutlets, peas, potatoes, and sliced tomatoes, and also coffee and chocolate pudding, and each enjoyed all that was set before him.

"Have you any particular chum at Oak Hall?" asked Dave, during the meal.

"I think a good deal of Phil Lawrence. He's a big fellow, and considered the head of the school, although he is rather quiet. He's a fine scholar, Phil is, and one of the best baseball players you ever met. There are a whole lot of others I like pretty well, too. I'll introduce you when we get to the Hall."

As soon as the meal was finished, the senator's son paid the bill, and then the two returned to the police station. Jackson, the policeman, had come back, and he announced that positively nothing whatever could be learned of the escaped criminal.

It was only a short while after this that a carriage drawn by a pair of spirited horses dashed up to the station house, and a man alighted. It was the same individual Dave had seen in front of the white house which had been robbed.

"That's my father," said Roger.

Senator Morr came in quickly, and wanted to know all about what had taken place, and the chief told him as much as he knew.

"This is the boy who spotted the rascal, father," said Roger, pointing to Dave. "His name is

Dave Porter, and just think, he is bound for Oak Hall like myself!"

"Glad to know you, Porter," said the senator, and shook hands. He was a big man, with a florid, pleasant face. "I only wish you had hung on to that thief."

"I wish that myself," answered Dave, with a smile. "But when he started he went like a flash."

"No doubt. Well, he had to leave the silver and gold-plated ware behind, anyway."

"What else did he take?"

"Two diamond rings, and a diamond brooch, besides a masonic charm which I prized very highly. The jewelry was worth probably eight hundred dollars."

"That's certainly a loss."

"Exactly. Oh, we must catch that fellow, sooner or later," added Senator Morr.

CHAPTER IX

GETTING ACQUAINTED

THE senator questioned Dave closely concerning all that had taken place on the train and also afterwards, and then told how the robbery had been committed.

"I believe that fellow was from some big city," said he. "At any rate he was no novice. The other folks, outside of Roger, had arranged to go on a visit to another house two miles away. I was to go with them, and went about half a mile, when I remembered that I had forgotten some important papers which I wished to have with me. I hurried back to the house on foot, thinking to make the journey later on, on horseback. The thief must have seen me coming, and must have run away only a few minutes before I arrived. I found everything in the bed-chambers and in the dining room topsy-turvy, and I knew at once what had happened. I ran out on the road to call in some farm hands, to go on a hunt for the thief."

"And that was when I saw you," said Dave. "One thing is sure, that thief must have made a quick run for the train."

" Evidently he did, and it must have been a task with such a heavy valise. His work around the rooms showed that he was a professional."

" I don't believe his name was Peter Snodgrass."

" Not at all, nor do I think those are his initials on that valise. Such rascals take every precaution to conceal their identity," added the senator.

Several times he was on the point of offering Dave some reward, but the boy showed plainly that he did not desire this, so Senator Morr said nothing on the subject. An alarm was sent out by mail and telegraph, offering a reward for the capture of the thief; but let it be added here that the rascal was not seen or heard of for a long time.

Dave remained in the town until nearly the end of the afternoon, and then, as there seemed to be nothing further to do in the matter, he and Roger Morr continued on their journey to Oak Hall. The unexpected happening had brought the boys close together, and each felt as if he had known the other for a long time.

" It's a feather in your cap, to have found that fellow," said Roger, as the train sped on its way. " We are not likely to forget it in a hurry."

" Oh, let us drop that," answered Dave. " Tell me about the school. I am anxious to know just what it is like." And Roger gave an excellent description of Oak Hall, and told of the teachers and the various courses of study. Then he men-

tioned the football and baseball teams, the rowing and gymnasium clubs, and spoke of the contests won and lost.

"We had some warm times at baseball early in the summer," he said. "I played first base and catcher, and we won nine games and lost four. Our boat club won three matches and lost the same number."

"I know I'd like to learn how to row," answered Dave. "But going into a race would be another thing."

"I hope the doctor puts you in our dormitory, Dave. There are six beds in it, and only four were occupied last season."

"I'll ask him to do so," was the prompt reply.

The run to Oakdale Junction occupied less than an hour, and here the two boys found they would have to wait half an hour before a train would start for Oakdale proper.

"We'll have to get supper here," said Roger. "I don't know what sort of feeding houses they have, but we'll have to do the best we can."

"You must have supper with me," said Dave. "But I can't promise you such a spread as we had for dinner."

"Oh, let us get a sandwich, a cut of pie, and a glass of milk," answered the senator's son. "I'm not so very hungry."

There was a neat little restaurant not far from

the depot, and hither the pair made their way. As they entered, a shout went up from four boys seated at a table in the rear.

"Here are two more of our crowd! Roger Morr and—who's the other chap?"

"How are you, fellows?" cried the senator's son, rushing forward and shaking hands. "Thought some of you would be around. Let me introduce a new student, Dave Porter, from Crumville. Dave, this is Phil Lawrence, whom we all look up to and adore. He's——"

"Cut it short, Roger," interrupted the boy who was considered the head of the school. "Glad to know you,"—the latter to Dave.

"This is Mr. Maurice Hamilton," went on the senator's son, nodding towards a tall, thin youth, who had his mouth full of pie. "But don't ever disgrace him by using his real name, as he wants everybody to call him Shadow, because he's so very hefty, and——"

"There you go again, Cheery!" spluttered the youth mentioned. "Can't you drop it?"

"This is our own particular pride, Buster Beggs, whose real name, I believe was, in babyhood, Joseph. Am I right, Buster, dear?" And Roger looked expectantly at a round-faced, fat boy, who was squeezed into a corner.

"Glad to know Mr. Porter," came from Beggs, with a squint. "But say, old man," he said, in a

As they entered, a shout went up from four boys seated at a table in the rear. — *Page 76.*

lowered voice, " let me give you a tip. Don't ever be seen again in Morr's company. He chews gum! " And then a general laugh went up, which Dave did not understand until later, when it was explained that Roger had once found every pocket of his clothes stuck fast with chewing gum. It was suspected that Chip Macklin, the school sneak, had played this trick, but it could not be proved.

" The fourth individual of this benighted community is Lazy. His real name is Samuel V. Q. X. Day, but call him Lazy and he'll come every time the dinner bell rings. He always smiles——"

" See here, Cheery, if it wasn't too much trouble I'd get up and spank you," came from Sam Day, a large-boned lad, with a stretchy, indolent air.

" There you have it, Dave. ' If it wasn't too much trouble! ' Do you wonder they call him Lazy? Why, he——"

" Say, that puts me in mind of a story I once heard," interrupted the lad called Shadow. " Lady gave a tramp a cherry pie. Says the tramp, ' Madam, can't you make it an apple pie? ' ' Why? ' says the lady. ' Cos this has pits in it,' answers the tramp. ' I hates to work me jaws gittin' rid on 'em! ' "

" Story number sixteen! " came from Phil Lawrence. " Ever since we ran across Shadow he has been loading us up with his comic journal jokes, and——"

"Which puts me in mind of another——" began Shadow.

"Not just now," interrupted Roger. "We came in to eat."

"I'm glad to know you all," said Dave, with a smile. "Roger has been telling me of you on the train." He shook hands with each of them.

"You want to be good when Dave's around," went on the senator's son. "He's a detective—regular sleuth——"

"Roger!" cried Dave, appealingly. "I thought you promised not to mention that again?"

"Did I? Well, I can't help it. It's this way, to cut a short story long, as the poets say. Our house was robbed this morning. Dave spotted the thief on the train, and through him we recovered a large portion of the goods. Wasn't that great?"

"Going to open a detective agency?" asked Buster Beggs, soberly. "If you are I'll call around. I lost a toothbrush last season, and——"

"I never hunt for toothbrushes unless the teeth go with them," came from Dave, brightly. He was catching the spirit of the crowd around him. "Now if you could only manage to lose your teeth——" And then a laugh went up.

"Which puts me in mind——" began Shadow.

"That we must make room for Roger and our new schoolfellow," finished Phil Lawrence.

"Here, Lazy, do get a move on, and help us push that small table against this one. There, now Porter can sit on one side and Roger on the other, and both can order what they please. Buster is going to pay the bill——"

"With cash collected from the others," interrupted Buster Beggs. "Don't think I am putting up for this crowd! Why, they'd eat me out of pocket money in an hour!"

A waiter was at hand, grinning broadly over the boys' fun. Dave and Roger ordered what they wished, and the former took possession of the two checks.

Dave found the crowd a thoroughly congenial one, and by the time the meal was over he felt fairly well at home with all of them. Notwithstanding their fun, they were manly lads, and each the soul of honor.

"I'll tell you one thing, boys," came from Phil Lawrence, when the party was on its way to the railroad station; "I shouldn't be surprised if we have a whole lot of trouble with Job Haskers this session. He was as mad as hops over the tricks played on him last spring."

"I believe you said Job Haskers was the second assistant," said Dave to Roger.

"Yes, and I don't know of a meaner man," answered the senator's son. "Why the doctor keeps him is a mystery to me, excepting it may be because

Haskers is such an excellent scholar. I have never had very much trouble with him, but the others have."

"Last season he kept me in all one afternoon just for throwing some roses across the room," came from Buster Beggs. "I threw 'em at a fellow named Flowers. And it was on the very day the main boat race came off."

"And didn't you see the race?" asked Dave.

"No. But I got square on old Haskers. Sid Gaston had a live alligator sent to him, and that night I stole into Haskers's room and dropped the 'gator into his bed. My, but wasn't there a time when Haskers went to bed!"

"I trust I don't have any trouble with this teacher," came from Dave.

"If you don't you'll have to toe the chalk mark pretty closely," put in Sam Day. "I know I had my hands full last Washington's Birthday. We were going to have a celebration in our dormitory that night, but Haskers got wind of it and he watched us so closely that we couldn't do a thing but go to bed."

"It was that sneak, Chip Macklin's, fault," put in Roger. "I wish we could have caught him at it!"

"If Chip did it it was because Gus Plum put him up to it," was Shadow Hamilton's comment. "No two ways about it, boys," he added, earnestly,

"somebody has got to teach that bully his place this session."

"I am not going to let him bother me," replied Phil Lawrence.

"Oh, he won't bother you—he'll go in for somebody smaller than himself," said Roger. "Just the same, I am going to stand out against him all I can."

"If he is such a bully he had better keep his distance," came from Dave. "I don't wish any trouble, but I shan't stand to be imposed upon."

"Gus Plum thinks that because he is rich he can do almost anything," said Phil Lawrence. "But for me, money doesn't cover it, not by a jugful."

"Which puts me in mind of a story——" began Shadow Hamilton. "Now, hold on, and don't interrupt me, for it's a good one," he interposed as several started to break in. "The ship was going down with all on board. Up from his stateroom comes a miser with his bag of gold. 'Save me!' he yells. 'Come into the small boat, but leave that gold behind,' yells back the captain. 'Not much!' cries the miser. 'Save the gold, and I'll try to swim ashore!' Gus Plum can't be one of us until he learns that his money doesn't count and that he has got to submit to the same treatment that others receive."

CHAPTER X

THE BULLY OF OAK HALL

It was after dark when Oakdale was reached, a pretty village containing six or seven hundred inhabitants, and located on a stream of water which we shall call the Leming River. The railroad station was new, and back of it was the main street, containing more than a block of stores and a number of fine dwellings. On the cross streets were other houses and also several churches, and the village also boasted of a small park, where the Oakdale Brass Band occasionally gave concerts during the summer.

Around the railroad station all was activity when the train came in. The Oak Hall stage was on hand, to take the boys to the academy, and also a wagon for their trunks and dress-suit cases.

"Hullo, Horsehair!" called out Roger, to the driver of the stage. "How are we to-morrow, as the clown says in the circus?"

"Pretty well, thank you," replied Jackson Lemond, with a good-natured grin. He was invariably called Horsehair because of the hairs which always clung to his clothing.

"And how is everybody at the Hall?" put in Phil Lawrence.

"Very well, sir."

"Many here yet?"

"About half the students, sir."

"This seems a little like old times," came from Buster Beggs, as he climbed up beside the driver. "Horsehair, do you remember when you drove me to the station last?"

"Remember? I shan't never forget it, Master Beggs," came from the stage driver. "But don't you try no tricks on this team, or we'll have trouble. That off horse ain't as gentle as he might be."

"In you go, Dave!" cried Roger. "Don't wait to be invited or you'll get left. Horsehair, this is a new student, Mr. Dave Porter. Dave, this is Mr. Horsehair Jackson Sampson Washington Lincoln Lemond, stage driver, actor, acrobat, and elocutionist."

"If he isn't on one stage he's on another," put in Phil Lawrence.

"Now, come——" began the stage driver, pleadingly.

"Isn't it true, Horsehair? Didn't you act, not once but half a dozen times? He was the cow in 'Back to the Farm,' the butler in 'The Millionaire's Secret,' and a real Roman soldier in the Boston revival of 'Julius Cæsar.'"

"Why didn't you stick to the stage?" asked Dave.

"He wasn't appreciated, that's why," answered Sam Day. "But some day you want to hear him recite, it's simply great."

"His address to the Romans will make you weep gallons of tears," came from Roger, with a wink.

"Speaking of gallons of tears puts me in mind of a story my uncle used to tell," came from Shadow Hamilton. "He had an old man working——"

"Save it, Shadow," came from one of the others. "We've had enough stories for one day."

"I haven't told more than——"

"Twenty-one," finished Phil Lawrence. "I've kept tab. Shadow, you ought to write for the comic papers, you'd make your fortune."

"Let's give 'em a song, boys!" cried Sam Day, and immediately started up, with words that were popular at Oak Hall.

"Oak Hall we never shall forget,
No matter where we roam,
It is the very best of schools,
To us it's just like home.
Then give three cheers, and let them ring
Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we
Elect to here abide!"

This was sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne," and at the end of the verse was added the academy cry:

Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall!
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!

"That is something like!" cried Roger, during the singing. "We'll let folks in this neighborhood know that we have arrived."

"Farmer Brown will be glad to know it,—I don't think," came from Buster Beggs.

"Oh, he'll love it!" answered Roger, and then he turned to Dave. "Buster and a lot of the others once took Farmer Brown's calf and hoisted it to the roof of the gymnasium building. They tied the calf to the center of the roof, so you couldn't see the animal from the playground. The calf bawled ferociously, and it was a long time before the teachers and the hired men could find out where the sounds came from."

"What did the farmer do?"

"He threatened to have somebody locked up, but nothing came of it. But he says he has a gun now, and if any boys come to his farm again he'll fill 'em full of shot."

"Well, you can't blame him much," answered Dave, with a smile. "I'd hate to have a calf of mine put up on a roof."

"Yes, but just the same, Dave, Brown missed it by raising such a row. We used to go over on

the sly, and buy milk and fruit, and such things. Now those sales are all lost to him."

The stage was rattling on at a lively rate. Occasionally it would pass other turnouts, and then the boys would give wild cheers and cat-calls, and would now and then get a cheer in return.

"There is the river," said Roger, presently. "It makes a turn here, under yonder oaks and willows, and then passes behind the Hall. You can't see much in the dark. I wish it was lighter. The first view of the academy from this road is an imposing one. For myself, I think Oak Hall is one of the prettiest school buildings I have ever seen."

In a few minutes the stage turned a corner, and they came to a broad campus, lined on either side with a low hedge of boxwood. At each corner of this campus was a heavy clump of giant oaks, and there were two great oaks on either side of the broad gateway. Close at hand hung a big lamp, and other lamps lined the driveway leading to the school building.

Oak Hall was a modern structure, of brick and stone, built in the shape of a broad cross. The hallways ran directly through the building, from north to south and east to west. The structure fronted south, and the classrooms were on that side and also on the east and west. On the north were the dining hall and the kitchen and also quar-

ters for the hired help. Above the classrooms were the dormitories, divided into quarters for four, six, or eight students. On the lower floor were also a reception room and several offices, and above them the sleeping rooms of the owner of the school and his various assistants. The entire school was finished in hardwood, well polished, and everything was scrupulously clean.

"Here we are!" cried Roger, as he leaped out of the stage. "Come on, Dave. There is Dr. Clay now."

Dave followed his companion, and the other boys also sprang out. Nearly every one rushed up to the doctor to shake hands.

Doctor Hasmer Clay proved to be a man well along in years, with iron-gray hair and sharp gray eyes. His face was kindly, but stern, and it was easy to see that he was not one to permit any nonsense during study hours. Yet he was a man who wanted his pupils to have recreation, and he often went out to view their games and their exercises in the gymnasium, or for a quiet sail on the river. It was rumored that in his day he had been a great football player, and this he did not deny.

"How do you do, Doctor?" said Roger, grasping the hand extended to him.

"Very well, thank you, Master Morr," was the answer. "Welcome back to Oak Hall. And whom have we here?"

"This is David Porter, from Crumville."

"Ah, yes!" Dr. Clay took Dave's hand and gave it a hearty shake. "I am glad to know you, Master Porter. I presume that accident on the railroad delayed you, as it delayed many of the others."

"Yes, sir," answered Dave. "That and something else."

"He helped to recover some things stolen from our house," put in Roger. "I'll have to tell you all about it some other time, Doctor. But what I want to know now is, can't he take one of the spare beds in our dormitory?"

"You are in No. 12, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was going to put him in that room."

"Good!"

"As you seem to be so well acquainted, perhaps you will show Master Porter the way," went on Dr. Clay. "His trunk is already in the dormitory. Have you had supper? If not, you may get what you wish by going down into the dining hall."

"Thank you, I've had all I want," said Dave.

"So have I," added Roger. "Come on," and they entered the building, leaving the doctor to greet some other arrivals.

"His putting you in our dormitory is a good thing for you," whispered Roger, as he led the way

up the broad staircase. "All the fellows in that room are in the same class."

"Then you think he expects to put me in your class?"

"More than likely. Your people wrote to him about what you knew, didn't they?"

"Yes, my teacher wrote about it."

"Then I imagine it's as good as settled."

They were just making a turn in the upper hall when a big boy, coming around another corner in a hurry, bumped into Dave.

"Hi, look where you are walking!" cried the big fellow, with an angry look at Dave.

"You'd better look yourself!" was Dave's quick retort, for he did not fancy the manner in which he had been addressed.

"What's that?" demanded the big fellow, stopping short and gazing at Dave in amazement.

"I said you had better look out yourself!" repeated Dave. "You ran into me, I didn't run into you."

"Well, you *are* cheeky! Who are you, anyway?"

"I am Dave Porter. Who are you?"

"You must be a new student."

"I am."

"Well, you look out the next time. If you don't, there will be trouble."

"You haven't told me who you are yet," went on Dave, calmly.

"I am Gus Plum."

"Oh!"

"Maybe you have heard of me," went on Gus Plum, quickly.

"I have heard of you. You're a good deal of a bully, so they say."

"Humph!"

"I presume that is why you just tried to bully me," continued Dave. "Let me tell you that I won't stand for it."

"Why, you——" began Gus Plum, in a rage, but at that moment a teacher appeared in the hallway, and he stopped short. "I'll see you another time, Dave Porter," he whispered, and then hurried off down the stairs.

CHAPTER XI

DAVE'S FIRST NIGHT AT THE HALL

"It looks as if you had put your foot into it the first thing," said Roger, as he ushered Dave into Dormitory No. 12, and closed the door after them. "Gus Plum won't forget this."

"I don't want him to forget it," answered Dave, calmly. "He shan't bully me, and that is all there is to it."

"I don't see what you can do, Dave. He's a good bit heavier and taller than you are."

"That may be true. Still I am not afraid of him."

"You talked to him rather sharply."

"It's the only way to do with bullies, Roger. If you try to smooth it over it only makes them more impudent."

"That may be true. But I don't want to see you get into a row the first thing," went on the senator's son.

The dormitory proved to be a bright and pleasant room, located in an angle of the building and looking toward a turn of the river. There were three beds on one side and three on the other, and

in the rear of the apartment were three double closets, one half for each boy.

"Here are the two vacant beds," said Roger, pointing them out. "And this is my bed."

"I'll take the one next to you."

"This is the vacant double closet. You'll have it all to yourself until somebody else comes in. You'll have to put your trunk stuff in the closet, and then the trunk will be put in the trunk room by Pop Swingly, the janitor."

"This is very nice indeed," said Dave, gazing around. "And marble basins with hot and cold water, too! No wonder you like this. It couldn't be more comfortable."

"Oak Hall is a second home to me," said the senator's son, dropping on a chair. "The air of the whole establishment is so home-like, don't you know. If it wasn't for such fellows as Gus Plum, Chip Macklin and a few others, the whole outfit would be perfect."

"It's a wonder the crowd doesn't unite to make Plum and his toadies toe the mark."

"There was talk of doing that last season, but the plan fell through. We were going to kidnap Plum, and take him to an island up the river, and keep him there until he promised to behave, but that sneak of a Macklin got wind of it, and then the jig was up."

"He must be a despicable wretch."

"He is. As soon as he hears of anything he carries it to Plum, or to the teachers."

"Well, if he plays the sneak on me, I'll give him a lesson he won't forget in a hurry."

A moment later came a tramping on the stairs and Buster Beggs came in, followed by Phil Lawrence.

"We stopped below for another bite," said Beggs. "Quite a crowd in the dining room. Gus Plum came in looking like a thunder-cloud. Wonder what was up with him."

"He got into a row with Dave the first thing," answered Roger, and described the meeting in the hallway. Phil Lawrence gave a low whistle.

"That's bad, Dave. Hope it doesn't amount to anything. Plum ought to have some consideration for a new boy."

Phil Lawrence belonged in the dormitory, while Beggs roomed in No. 11, next door. Between the two dormitories was a door which had a bolt upon each side of it, but which was usually left open.

It was not long before other pupils came up, and Dave was introduced to several, including Luke Watson, a lad who was a good deal of a musician, and who had brought with him a banjo and a guitar, and Bertram Vane, a delicate-looking youth, who went by the nickname of Polly, because of his girlish ways. The pupils were all whole-souled fellows, and Dave was surprised to

find how quickly he felt at home with them. If he acted green in any way they did not appear to notice it, which was to their credit.

"Some of the fellows are talking football already," said Sam Day. "I told them to give me a chance to sit down first."

"Trust Lazy to say something like that," came from Shadow Hamilton, with a grin. "Puts me in mind of a story I heard about a tramp who was going to cut wood for an old lady. He asked her if she'd lend him a rocking-chair to do it in, as he wasn't used to standing," and then there was a general snicker.

With it all, however, the majority of the boys were tired from traveling and glad to retire. Dave unpacked only a portion of his trunk, and by ten o'clock was in his bed and ready to go to sleep.

"Lights out!" came the cry of a monitor passing through the hallway. "Lights out!"

The light in the dormitory was turned low by one of the boys, and then the light in the hall followed suit. Dave stretched himself and turned over to go to sleep. He had hardly done so when there was a vicious tug at the sheet under him, and he found himself flat on his back on the floor.

"Hullo, Porter, are you moving?" came in a low voice from one of the other beds. "Thought you were tired,"

"This is one on me," cried Dave, cheerfully, and started to rise, when swock! something wet hit him in the face. It was a towel saturated with ice water, and the cold fluid ran down over his breast and backbone.

Dave caught a dim glimpse of the boy who threw the towel, and watching his opportunity, he hurled it back, taking the lad full in the mouth. Then a pillow came sailing through the air, followed by a shoe and a cake of soap, and Dave went over once more. But he caught up each article and sent it back.

"Is this a free-for-all fight?" he asked in a low voice. "If it is I want to know it. There you are, and welcome!" and he hurled a rug at a lad who was sending forth another pillow. "Don't be timid. You can have all that is coming to you!"

The fun grew fast and furious, and pillows, shoes, wet towels, and rugs went sailing first in one direction and then another. One lad was almost smothered in a blanket thrown over his head, and another went down with a mattress over him.

"Hi, let up!" came from Buster Beggs. "Enough is enough!"

"I didn't start this," answered Dave. "I'll stop when the others do."

"Cheese it! The monitor!" came the cry, a second later. "Into bed with you, fellows!"

And then came a wild scramble. With nothing on his bed but a mattress and a blanket Dave laid down. A loud knock sounded out on the door.

"Did any of you young gentlemen call for anything?" came the mild question.

"It's Murphy! Bless his heart!" whispered Shadow Hamilton. "He won't report us."

"It's all right, Murphy," answered Phil Lawrence. "I was only chasing out the mosquitoes."

"Well, please make less noise doing it. The doctor won't stand for such a racket," returned the monitor, and passed on.

"Jim Murphy is a peach," said Roger. "As long as he is monitor we are safe here. But I guess we had better call it off, fellows," he added.

The beds were re-made and the wet towels, shoes, rugs, and soap redistributed, and in a few minutes more all of the lads retired. Some had been pretty well soaked with water, but nobody complained.

"That was a pretty easy initiation," thought Dave. But the country boy had made an error; the real initiation was still to come, but not that night.

It took some time for Dave to get to sleep, but once in the land of Nod he slept soundly, and did not awaken until the clanging of a loud bell broke upon his ear.

"That's the first bell," said Roger, in answer

to Dave's inquiring look. "We've got half an hour to get dressed and go down to the dining room in."

"That's more time than I need," answered Dave. "I can unpack the rest of my trunk in that time," and he did.

There had been frolics in more than one dormitory that night and several of the pupils appeared in the dining hall with black eyes and numerous scratches. But no complaints had been made and no questions were asked.

In the dining hall Dave was placed at one of the long tables presided over by Andrew Dale, the first assistant to Dr. Clay. At another table was the doctor himself, and not far away was Job Haskers, the second assistant.

It took but a glance to show Dave that Andrew Dale was kind-hearted and considerate, while Job Haskers was exactly the opposite. The first assistant had a mild, winsome manner, which attracted all the boys to him. The second assistant always spoke in a manner that was repellant. But he was really a brilliant teacher, and that was why Dr. Clay retained him.

Not far from Dave sat Gus Plum, who scowled deeply when he caught the eyes of the boy from the country. But Dave did not flinch, and he showed the bully that he was not afraid of him.

The breakfast was a plain, but substantial one, and Dave fell to with vigor.

"I wish I had such an appetite," said Polly Vane, who sat close by. "But I can't eat more than a bird," he added, sweetly. His girlish manner made it hard for Dave to keep a straight face. It was not until some time later that he learned that Polly was one of the best students at the Hall.

The breakfast over, the new students were told to go to Dr. Clay's private office. They numbered twelve, and began to talk among themselves while waiting for the proprietor of the Hall to join them.

"I came from a school out in Maine," said one boy named Harry Haven. "The master was a softy and the fellows used to ride right over him."

"I don't think you'll ride over Dr. Clay," said Dave.

"You won't ride over Mr. Haskers," put in another. "Oh, but wasn't he sharp at breakfast. He watched us like a hawk. You couldn't make a move but that his eye was on you."

It was not long before Dr. Clay came in briskly. He saw to it that each new pupil had been properly registered, and then he examined each in private. Dave had to wait nearly an hour, but the examination took less than fifteen minutes.

"Your learning does you credit, Porter," said the doctor, at the conclusion. "You are well fitted

to go into the class you mentioned. I will take you to the proper classroom and introduce you."

Two pupils went with Dave, and all were introduced in a formal way to Job Haskers, who bowed stiffly, and then assigned them to seats. Dave found himself just across the aisle from Roger, which suited him exactly. But behind Dave was Gus Plum, which was not so pleasant. A set of books had been handed over to the boy from the country, and he proceeded to stow these away in his desk.

"So they have put you in this class," whispered Gus Plum. "Didn't know you were so wise."

"I'm too wise to be imposed upon," whispered Dave, in return.

"Don't you get fresh, or there 'll be trouble," growled the bully.

"Well, if there is trouble, it will be of your own choosing."

"Silence in the room!" came sharply from Job Haskers. "Those who were talking stand up!"

There was a pause, and then Dave stood up, along with three others. Gus Plum remained seated.

"Hum! Porter, as you are a new pupil, I will excuse you. Pratt, Davis, and Dodd will write the word Silence a hundred times after school hours. We will now turn to our lesson in history for to-day."

CHAPTER XII

ON THE RIVER

As was to be expected, Dave found life at Oak Hall rather strange for the first week after his arrival. Coming from the farm and from such a quiet home as that of Oliver Wadsworth, the bustle and excitement were at the start confusing, and more than once he took a quiet walk by himself, to settle his nerves and think the situation over. Yet with it all he "found his feet" rapidly, and if he was green, he tried his best to hide it.

From the start, Roger was his own particular chum, and it was simply wonderful how well the country lad and the senator's son got along together. They had many tastes in common, and one seldom wanted to do a thing but that the other was perfectly willing to take part.

Much to Dave's gratification, he had little or no trouble with his studies, and Roger was likewise an excellent pupil. Each wished to come out at the top of the class, or near it, and both often worked over their lessons while the other students were at play.

Dave had been asked only a few questions con-

cerning his family connections and it was only Roger who, at first, learned the truth. The senator's son was deeply interested in the story of how the country boy had been found near Crumville and taken to the poorhouse.

"I should think you would want to know all about yourself, Dave," said he. "For all you know, you may be the son of some rich person and a fortune may be awaiting you."

"No such luck for me, Roger," answered Dave, with a smile. "I am a poor boy, and that is all there is to it. Just the same, I'd like to know something about my parents, and whether or not they are alive."

"I'll help you look into the case some day," said the senator's son, little dreaming of what the future held in store on that point.

By the other boys it was imagined that Dave must be some relative of Oliver Wadsworth, and that the rich manufacturer was his guardian. Boy fashion, the majority asked no questions at all, but took Dave for "what he was worth," as it is commonly expressed.

There was one youth, however, who seemed to take a particular dislike to Dave at the very start, and this dislike increased as the days went by. This boy was Gus Plum, already mentioned as the bully of Oak Hall. Plum was the son of a millionaire patent-medicine manufacturer, and in his

younger years had been allowed to do largely as he pleased, besides having more spending-money than was good for him. But at home he had grown so wild that his father had sent him to Oak Hall to be put in training. Here he gathered around him a number of the boys, who helped him to spend his cash, and who did all sorts of mean and sneaking tasks for him.

Gus Plum's principal tool was Chip Macklin. He was a small lad, with a shock of red hair and eyes that squinted. Hardly any of the other students liked Macklin, but he and Gus Plum got along remarkably well together. Each knew the other's secrets, and neither dreamed of exposing his friend.

After Dave had been at the Hall a week, he wrote long letters to Mr. Wadsworth and to Caspar Potts, telling them of the place and of how he was getting along. These communications were read with interest, and Caspar Potts especially was gratified to learn that the youth was doing so well in his studies.

"Dave says everything seems easy to him," said the old professor. "It is wonderful how quick he is to learn."

"He is the sort that deserves a good education," returned the manufacturer. "I am glad I sent him to Oak Hall, and he shall certainly go to college later on."

Dave also sent a letter to Ben Basswood, and in return got word that Ben was doing his best to get his folks to let him come to Oak Hall.

"I hope he comes," said the country lad to Roger. "I know the others will like him."

It was a warm, clear day in September, and school had been dismissed a quarter of an hour before. The pupils had two hours for recreation, and some were in the "gym.," some on the playground, and others on the river or down to the boathouse.

"What do you say if we go for a row on the river?" asked Roger of Dave, as he threw down a Latin book he had been studying.

"Just the thing!" cried Dave, laying down an algebra. "I've been wanting to row on the river ever since I got here. Can we get a boat?"

"I think so. Each class has four boats, and I don't think many of our class are out on the river to-day. Most of them went off to the gym."

The two boys were soon out of the academy and on their way to the boathouse, a pretty affair, standing partly on the bank and partly over the water. At one end of the house was a general meeting room, with lockers for rowing suits, and at the other were the boats and shells used by the students. A short distance from the boathouse were a row of bathing houses, and here over a dozen pupils were in swimming.

As Dave and Roger hurried to the boathouse they passed Gus Plum and Chip Macklin. The big youth scowled at Dave, and the sneak squinted at Roger.

"What a pair!" said the boy from the country. "All the money in the world will never make Gus Plum a gentleman."

"I wish he and Macklin were out of the school," was Roger's quick comment. "Both of them always act as if they were just waiting for a chance to do one an injury."

"Plum is certainly not honorable. When Mr. Haskers asked us to stand up for talking he never budged. I wouldn't be so mean."

"I don't believe Gus Plum knows the meaning of honor, Dave. He is thoroughly selfish and willing to do anything to gratify his own wishes. I suppose he laughed at you and the others who stood up for exposing yourselves."

"I don't care if he did. I know I did what was fair."

In the meantime Gus Plum and Chip Macklin stopped in their walk, and turning around, watched Dave and Roger closely.

"Maybe you'll get a chance at 'em to-day, Gus," said Macklin.

"I wish I could, Chip. Wonder where they are going?"

"Out for a row most likely."

"Let us go out on the river, too."

"Oh, it's too warm to row," said the sneak of the school.

"You mean you are too lazy, you little beggar!" answered the bully, with a laugh. "But you needn't row. Rasmer said he would hire out that gasoline launch of his. Come on up and get that."

"Do you know how to run it?"

"To be sure I do. Didn't I have a launch of my own at home? Come ahead." And off the two boys started to a boating establishment run by a man named Ike Rasmer.

Reaching the boathouse, Roger managed to get a fair-sized rowboat without trouble, and also two pairs of oars. He and Dave were just entering the craft when Phil Lawrence hailed them.

"Want anybody along?"

"To be sure, Phil!" cried Roger.

"Yes, come ahead," added Dave, and soon Phil was in the stern, and ready to do the steering with a little paddle he picked up for that purpose.

"I don't know much about rowing," said Dave, after they had pushed off. "Roger has promised to give me some pointers."

"Well, Roger can do it," answered the big boy of the school. "He can handle a rowboat as well as any of us."

They decided to turn down the river, and were soon gliding along in capital style. Despite what he had said, Dave could handle his oars fairly well, and after a little coaching from the senator's son got along without much trouble.

"All you need is practice," said Roger. "You have the idea."

"I'd like to be a good oarsman and get into some race," said Dave. "I think I'd like that better than any sport, outside of baseball."

"Well, you'll have chance enough, this fall and next spring," came from Phil. "Now, as for me, give me baseball or football every time."

They passed half a dozen other boats, including one containing Shadow Hamilton and Sam Day. The former was doing the rowing, while the latter was sprawled on the stern seat, half asleep.

"Talk about taking things easy!" cried Phil. "Just look at Lazy!"

"Wait till I wake him up," said Roger, and taking up his dripping oar, he allowed some of the water to drop directly on Sam Day's upturned face. There was a splutter, and Sam Day leaped up wildly.

"Wha—what's the matter?" he stammered.

"It's raining!" cried Dave. "Put up your umbrella!"

"Humph! Don't you do that again, Roger Morr, or I'll sprinkle you good!"

"Why don't you row, Lazy?"

"It's too much like work. Shadow wanted me to come along and keep him company," and Sam Day gave a deep yawn.

"I told him one of my best stories, just to keep him awake, but it didn't work," came from Shadow. "It was a story about a Dutchman who——"

"Say, don't tell it again, please," burst in Sam Day. "I heard it once."

"You didn't act as if you heard it, and, anyway, the others weren't here," went on Shadow, calmly. "This Dutchman was taking a vacation along the shore of a chain of lakes. One day he went out for a row, and while he was in the middle of one of the lakes his boat began to leak. 'Maybe I got trowned alretty, ain't it!' said he to himself, and put for an island in the middle of the lake. He stayed on the island all that day and that night, until he was half starved. Then he began to yell for help, and by and by some men came along in a boat. 'What's the matter with you?' asked one of the men. 'Mine poat is busted an' I canno get me py der shore again!' said the Dutchman. 'I canno schwim!' 'Then why don't you walk to shore,' said one of the men. 'The water is only two feet deep!' 'Py chiminy! Two feets, und I vos so hungry like neffer vos!' groaned the Dutchman, and tore his hair out by the roots."

There was a short laugh, and then Dave looked serious.

"Was that Dutchman's name Schwitzer?" he asked, innocently.

"Schwitzer? I don't know."

"Did he come from Holland?"

"Of course he must have come from Holland. I——"

"What part of Holland?" went on Dave, calmly.

"Why—er—what has that got to do with it, Porter?"

"Did he come from The Hague, or Amsterdam, or Rotterdam, or——"

"I—I don't know where he came from."

"Are you dead-sure he was a Dutchman? Mightn't he have been a German, or a Swede, or a Norwegian, or——"

"Say, you're poking fun at me!" roared Shadow Hamilton.

"When you tell a tale like that, you ought to be able to verify your statements," continued Dave. "Now about that lake. What latitude and longitude was it located in, and whom was it named after, supposing it had a name? And as to the depth of the water, was it precisely two feet, or two feet and one in——"

"I'll two feet you!" shouted Shadow, and made a pass with one of his oars, but Dave ducked, and

soon the two rowboats drifted apart, while all of the lads in both crafts laughed heartily over the way the story had been turned on Hamilton.

"That was all right," said Phil, with a broad smile. "Shadow didn't know where he was at."

"We've got to do something to stop that flow of yarns," answered Dave. "If we don't they'll get like weeds in an onion bed—worse and worse every day."

CHAPTER XIII

PLANS FOR A FEAST

It was not long before the rowboat which our friends occupied reached the mouth of a creek flowing into the river, and up this smaller watercourse they pursued their way, under the oaks and weeping willows that lined the banks.

"What a beautiful bit of scenery!" was Dave's admiring comment. "Some artist ought to paint this!"

"It has been painted, and photographed, too," said Phil. "I took a time exposure of it one day last summer. It made a fine photo, I can tell you. The painting was done by an artist from Springfield, who was stopping with Dr. Clay."

Half an hour was spent up the creek and then they turned back into the river. As they did this Phil consulted the watch he carried.

"Half an hour yet," he said.

"Oh, we can get back in plenty of time," answered Roger. "Listen!"

He and Dave stopped rowing, and all of the boys listened. From a distance came a strange pup, pup, pup!

"I know what it is," declared Roger. "It's one of those gasoline launches."

"I didn't know they had them at the Hall," returned Dave.

"We haven't any, but there are several on the river. Here she comes now!"

As Roger spoke, the gasoline launch shot into view. The craft was about twenty-five feet long and correspondingly broad of beam, and carried an engine of several horse-power.

"Why, I declare, there are Gus Plum and Chip Macklin!" cried Phil. "They must have hired that craft."

"They are coming this way," said Dave. "I hope they don't come too close."

"Hi, there, look where you are going!" cried Roger, loudly. "Don't run us down!"

"Get out of the way!" came roughly from Gus Plum. And he kept the gasoline launch to her course.

"They'll certainly run us down!" ejaculated Phil, leaping up in alarm. "Hi, Gus, turn to your left! To your left!" he yelled.

By this time the launch was dangerously close. With frantic haste Roger set to work to row out of the way and Dave did the same. They had to pull directly for the bank of the river, and as they shot shoreward the launch scraped their stern, and turned the rowboat over on its side.

As the craft went over, the three occupants went with it, and all landed in the water and mud heels over head. Then the launch went on, but Gus Plum turned off the power.

"That's the time you did it," was Chip Macklin's whispered comment. "Won't they be mad!"

"Mind, it was their fault, not ours," answered the bully, in a low voice. "We were steering a straight course and they got in our way," and the sneak nodded, to show that he understood.

When the three unfortunates managed to scramble to their feet they did a good deal of spluttering before they got rid of the water that had entered their mouths, noses, and ears. The boat, still on its side, was stuck in the mud of the river bank.

"All—all safe?" asked Roger, when he could speak.

"I'm safe, but I've got a lot of mud on me," answered Dave.

"Ditto here," came from Phil. "Boys, that was a mean trick," he added, indignantly.

"Hi, Gus Plum, I want you to stop!" yelled out Roger.

"What do you want?" came coolly from the bully.

"We want you to come back," added Dave.

"I'm not coming back."

"If you don't come back you'll be sorry for it."

"Humph! It wasn't my fault that your boat went over."

"It was your fault, Gus Plum," came from Phil.

"I'm going to get square for this," continued Dave, his eyes flashing. "I'll teach you to let me alone after this."

"Ha! So you threaten me!" roared the bully. "Do you suppose I'm afraid of such a country greeny as you? Not much!"

"Perhaps you'll be afraid when I get through with you," retorted Dave, who was thoroughly angry. "You've been picking a quarrel with me ever since I arrived."

"Pooh! I'm not putting myself out to pick quarrels with such country bumpkins as you!" retorted Gus Plum. "If you don't like the way I treat you, you can do the other thing."

"I believe you ran into us on purpose," said Roger.

"Maybe you'll report me to Dr. Clay," sneered the bully.

"You certainly ought to be reported."

"All right, play the sneak and tell,—it's just your style."

"We can tell our side of the story," came from Chip Macklin. "We can prove that you got in our way, and that the accident wasn't our fault at all."

"I shan't report this," called out Dave, for the launch was now drifting further away. "I'll settle it with you two fellows myself."

No more could be said, for the launch was now a goodly distance away. Once more Gus Plum started up the engine, and soon he and his companion and their craft disappeared around a bend of the winding stream.

"That Dave Porter talks as if he meant business," said Macklin, nervously.

"Humph, I'm not afraid of him, Chip. Why I think I can fight him with one hand, if it comes to that!" added the millionaire's son, boastfully.

"He's a country boy, and most country boys are pretty strong."

"Well, I'm strong, too, and I've taken boxing lessons in the bargain. If Mr. Dave Porter don't want to get hurt he had better keep his distance."

"Do you suppose they'll report us?"

"I don't care if they do. Our story will be as good as theirs," answered Gus Plum.

Left to themselves, the three boys in the water righted their rowboat and bailed it out, and then rowed swiftly back to the boathouse.

"After all, I don't think it will do us any good to report this," said Roger. "Plum and Macklin will do their best to squeeze out of it."

"Roger is right," said Phil. "But I am going to make that bully keep his distance after this."

"That's my idea of it," said Dave. "He has been at me ever since I arrived. I'm going to give him fair warning, and if he does the least thing after that, I'll pitch into him roughshod."

Leaving the boathouse, the three students hurried into the Hall and up to their dormitory, where they lost no time in changing their wet clothes for dry. They had just finished when the bell rang for supper.

"That was a close shave," said Phil. "Wonder if Plum and Macklin are back?"

They entered the dining hall and sat down. The meal had just started when the bully and the sneak came in, and slipped into their places.

"Late, eh?" said Job Haskers, eying both severely. "I cannot permit this. Both of you will write the word, Late, one hundred times tomorrow, after school hours."

"Mr. Haskers, I——" began Gus Plum.

"Silence, Plum, I wish no explanation. You have been late too many times. Eat your supper." And after that there was silence.

Roger, Dave, and Phil had expected to talk to Gus Plum and his toady the next day, but the pair did their best to keep out of the way.

"They know we have it in for them," said Roger.

Several days passed and still the bully and his toady kept their distance. By that time Dave's

anger had cooled somewhat, and he turned his attention to other matters. There was much for him to do, and he was kept busy from early morning until it was time to retire.

During those days he received word which pleased him greatly. A letter came from Ben Basswood, which read in part as follows:

"I have at last got my parents' consent to my going to Oak Hall, and father is writing to-day to Dr. Clay about it. If all goes well, I shall come along next Monday, and in my trunk I expect to bring a lot of good things, so that we can celebrate in a fitting style. From what you have written about your classmates, I know I shall like them, and I trust to have a bang-up time during the term."

"Hurrah!" cried Dave, on reading this communication, and then he read it out loud, for Roger and Phil's benefit.

"I'm glad Ben is coming," said the senator's son. "Oh, you'll like him," he added to Phil. "All the boys do."

"Speaking of a celebration, that is just what I have had in mind ever since all of the fellows arrived," said Phil. "Let us go in for a regular blow-out. We can join with the fellows in No. 11 and have a dandy time."

"When?" questioned Dave, doubtfully.

"After bedtime, of course."

"All right, I'm with you. But we mustn't get found out."

"Don't fear for that. We can put out a guard —same as we always do when we have a feast. The only person we have to fear is Job Haskers."

"And that sneak of a Chip Macklin," put in Roger. "If he blabs on us I'll wring his neck for him."

"I've got a plan to get rid of Haskers," went on Phil. "Let us send him a message in the afternoon asking him to come to town on important business. He'll get Murphy to do the monitor work for him, and Murphy will be easy."

So it was agreed, and after that, during spare hours, hardly anything was talked over but the proposed midnight feast. All the students of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 were carefully sounded, and each voted favorably on the project. Roger "passed around the hat," and by this means four dollars and fifteen cents were collected to pay for the spread.

Dave was fearful that Ben might fail them at the last minute, but upon asking Dr. Clay he was informed that his friend would arrive on the following Monday afternoon.

"And as he is well acquainted with you and with Roger Morr, I have decided to let him oc-

cupy the empty bed in your room," added the master of the Hall.

"Oh, thank you very much, Doctor," cried Dave, warmly. "I was wishing you'd do that." And then he ran off to spread the good news.

Dave and Roger had been delegated to buy the things for the spread, and for that purpose asked permission to go to Oakdale to meet Ben. This was readily granted, and they went down in the Hall carryall, immediately after dinner.

"I hope the train is late," said Roger on the way. "It will give us a little time to do some shopping," and he winked at Dave.

"Train is 'most generally late," said Jackson Lemond. "I reckon it won't be here for an hour or more," and so it proved.

"Come and have some root beer and a cigar, Horsehair," said Roger, and to this the driver for the Hall readily consented. While he was enjoying his treat, Dave and the senator's son slipped away to buy the things they wanted.

"We mustn't waste time," said Roger. "If we do, Horsehair may suspect something is wrong."

"It won't take long to buy what we want," answered Dave. "Lead the way. You know where the stores are. As yet, I'm a stranger here, but I don't expect to remain so long."

CHAPTER XIV

BEN BASSWOOD'S ARRIVAL

THE students to participate in the proposed feast had made out a list of the things desired, so Dave and Roger had to do no thinking on that score. The senator's son led the way to the baker's shop, and here they procured several cakes and also a dozen chocolate éclairs and cream puffs. Then came a trip to the candy shop across the way, where they obtained several pounds of confectionery. Next they called at a grocery, for sugar and some lemons for lemonade.

"I wish we could take along some soda and root beer," said Roger. "But I am afraid the bottles would be too heavy."

"I've got an idea," answered Dave. "Let us get the stuff and hide it under the seat of the carryall. We can get it out of the carriage to-night, when Horsehair isn't around."

"Just the thing—if the scheme will work!" cried Roger. "Let us risk it, anyway. A dozen bottles won't cost a fortune, and the storekeeper can leave them right in the box."

They were soon at the shop where soda and

other "soft" drinks were sold, and there procured a case containing one dozen bottles of various kinds and flavors. This they took from the shop by a back way, and had it stowed under the rear seat of the carryall before Jackson Lemond put in an appearance. With the box they put their bundles of cake and candy and the other things.

"Here comes the train!" announced the driver, and in a moment more the express rolled into the station and half a dozen people alighted.

"There is Ben!" shouted Dave, and rushed forward to meet his friend, followed by Roger. All were soon shaking hands.

"You're looking fine," said Ben to Dave, as he surveyed the country lad critically. "I declare you look like a regular dyed-in-the-wool academy student already!"

"And that is just what he is," said Roger. "And we are getting to be great chums," he added.

"I'm glad of that," went on Ben. "I can tell you I am that happy over coming to Oak Hall I don't know what to do. You see, I've heard about this school for so long."

"You'll like it," said Dave. "I can't see what fault anybody could find."

"We've been buying some things for a spread, in honor of your arrival," whispered Roger.

"They are under the carriage seat. But mum's the word, for we don't want the driver to know."

"I've got some cake and stuff in a box in my trunk," whispered Ben in return. "Here's the check. I hope they didn't smash things too much. They handle trunks pretty roughly on this railroad."

"They do on all roads," declared the senator's son. "That's the reason they call baggagemen trunk-smashers."

The check was passed over to the Hall driver, and soon the trunk was lashed to the back of the carryall, and off the crowd started for the Hall. On the way Ben told of affairs at Crumville, and of a visit he had paid to the Wadsworths and Caspar Potts.

"The old professor is very proud to think you are doing so well here," said Ben. "And the others are delighted too."

"And how is Professor Potts's health?"

"They told me it was better than it had been. He takes care of the flowers and does a great deal of writing for Mr. Wadsworth. And what do you think?" cried Ben, suddenly. "Nat Poole is thinking of coming to this academy."

"What, to Oak Hall!" ejaculated Dave.

"Exactly. I heard it by accident."

"I don't like that."

"Neither do I, but he has as much right to come here as we have."

"Who is this Nat Poole?" questioned Roger.

"A rich young fellow who lives not far from Crumville," answered Dave. "He is a high-flyer, and loves to lord it over everybody around him."

"Something like Gus Plum?"

"I don't think he is as rich as Plum, and he is not quite so rough. He's one of the mean, insulting kind."

"I guess I understand. Well, if he comes here he had better mind his P's and Q's or he'll get into hot water," was the comment of the senator's son.

When the Hall was reached the driver of the carryall dumped Ben's trunk at the main entrance of the building, and then drove around to the stable.

"I'm going around with Horsehair," said Roger, with a wink. "Here, take these bundles," and he handed over several articles to Dave, who rushed off without delay, and stowed them in a far corner of one of the dormitory closets, under some clothing. He had just accomplished this when Phil Lawrence appeared.

"Say, Phil, Roger is at the stable, and I guess he wants to see you," said Dave, significantly.

"All right, I'm on," was Phil's answer, and

off he ran to help with the other things. Dave in the meantime rejoined Ben, who was still at the front door. The office bell was rung, and Dr. Clay immediately put in an appearance.

"So this is Master Basswood," he said, shaking hands. "I am pleased to know you, and I welcome you to Oak Hall. Come into my office, and you may come too, Master Porter, if you wish."

A short talk took place in the office, and Ben was questioned briefly in regard to his studies. Then both were dismissed, and Dave took his friend up to dormitory No. 12.

"This is to be your bed," said Dave. "That is mine, that is Roger's, and those belong to the other fellows in our set. Next to this room is dormitory No. 11, connecting with this by that door. No. 11 and No. 12 always pull together in everything, and we are going to have that feast to-night."

"All providing something doesn't occur to cut it short," said Ben, with a grin. "I've heard that Dr. Clay is very strict about these things."

"He has to be—or some of the fellows would ride right over him. But we've fixed it to get rid of one of the teachers—Job Haskers—and the head monitor, Murphy, will sort of stand in with us,—so I fancy all will go smoothly."

The trunk had been brought up, and Dave assisted his friend to stow away his things. From

the depths of the receptacle, Ben brought forth more cake and candy, and a jar of raspberry jelly, with a couple of spoons and a table knife.

"We'll have enough and to spare, that's certain," was Dave's comment. "Now, if only——"

Hurried footsteps through the hallway interrupted him and then the handle of the door was tried.

"Who's there?"

"It is I, Roger," was the answer. "Open the door, quick!"

The door was unlocked and opened, and in came Roger and Phil, carrying the case of bottles and some other things between them. As soon as they had entered, they shut the door behind them.

"That sneak of a Chip Macklin was watching us," cried the senator's son. "My, but I'd like to run him out of town!"

"Do you suppose he found out what you were up to?" asked Dave, in equal alarm.

"I don't know—I hope not."

"If he found out, the jig is up," groaned Phil. "He'll blab, as sure as eggs are unhatched chicks."

"Where is he now?"

"Oh, we gave him the slip. He thought we were coming up one stairway, and we went the long way around."

The bottles were taken from the case and secreted in a number of the beds, and the case itself was turned upside down, covered with a cloth, and made to look like a footstool. This done, Phil and Ben were introduced to each other; and a little later the newcomer was introduced to Buster Beggs, Sam Day, Shadow Hamilton, and half a dozen other students who made up the occupants of dormitories No. 11 and No. 12. All seemed to like Ben, and the latter soon felt quite at home among them.

The message had been sent to Job Haskers, and immediately after supper the assistant teacher arrayed himself in his best and hurried away.

"He'll be mad when he learns he has been fooled," said Phil. "But he'll have to make the best of it."

"What did you write to him?" asked Roger, for Phil had been the one to pen the note.

"Told him that a young lady who was much interested in him wished to have an interview," answered Phil. "He was to meet her at the railroad station not later than ten o'clock. She would wear a white rose pinned to her dress. It was great to see Haskers swallow the bait," and Phil chuckled, while some of the others laughed outright.

"If he finds you out he'll kill you," said Buster Beggs.

"Which puts me in mind of a story I once read," began Shadow. "A lady once——"

"Stow it away, Shadow!" cried Roger. "Those stories will come in handy to-night."

"That's it!" cried several others. "Shadow can tell what he pleases to-night," and at this Hamilton smiled, for it was becoming hard to get anybody to listen to his yarns.

During the evening Dave and Roger took Ben around the grounds, showing the newcomer the boathouse, the gymnasium, and other points of interest. While down by the river Dave related the incident of the gasoline launch.

"I'd square up with Gus Plum for that," said Ben.

"We shall," answered Dave. "Just give us time."

"Does Plum know anything about this spread for to-night?"

"I should hope not."

With Job Haskers gone, Murphy was delegated to do the hall work of the assistant teacher. As soon as this became known Roger called the monitor aside.

"Say, Murphy, I've got a toothache and another fellow in our room has the earache," he said. "So, if you hear us moving around to-night, don't make any fuss over it."

"All right, only don't move around too lively,"

answered the monitor, with a grin. "What gave you the toothache?"

"I think some candy will give it to me," said Roger. "Here, have some, will you?" and he passed over a bag of chocolates.

"Thanks, Morr." Murphy smacked his lips. "Got anything to wash this down with?"

"There'll be a bottle of root beer in the corner of the hall to-night when lights go out."

"Good enough." The monitor paused. "But, mind you, not too much noise, or I won't stand for it."

"We'll be as quiet as mice in a lion's cage," assented the senator's son.

"I'll wager it was you got Job Haskers to leave to-night?"

"Oh, he went away because he got a message to do so."

"Sure, and who sent the message?" and Murphy closed one eye suggestively.

"The party who wrote it, I reckon," answered Roger, coolly. "But that isn't our affair, is it?"

"Not at all—not at all," said the monitor. "A bottle of root beer in the corner of the hall. All right, and what shall I do with the empty bottle?"

"Leave it in the corner and we'll take care of it later. Now stuff your ears and be good!" added Roger, and with this remark he hurried off to join his chums once more.

CHAPTER XV

A FEAST AND A SNEAK

All of the boys interested in the feast tried to appear unconcerned during the evening, but each wished that the time to retire would arrive.

"I trust Plum and Macklin don't suspect what is going on," said Sam Day. "They are always on the lookout to upset our plans."

"We must keep our eyes peeled for them," answered Roger. "It's the best we can do."

Promptly on time the boys of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 retired. The bottle of root beer was put out for Murphy, along with a generous slice of cake and some candy, both done up in a paper napkin.

There were more than enough cakes and candies to go around. Several pitchers of ice water had also been brought up, and two of the students set to work to make lemonade.

Promptly on time the monitor passed and called out: "Light out!" in his usual monotonous tone. Then of a sudden he stuck his head in at the door. "Mind now, no noise," he said, softly, and withdrew again.

"He's a gem," came from Phil.

The boys waited for quarter of an hour, until all seemed at rest in the Hall. Then they gathered in dormitory No. 12, and brought forth all the good things to eat and to drink. Cakes were cut, and glasses filled, and the candy was passed around, and likewise the fruit.

"This is peachy!" exclaimed Buster Beggs, taking a huge mouthful of orange layer cake.

"Thought that was orangy," came from Dave, with a grin.

"Oh, you know what I mean. I wish we could have a feast once a week."

"So say we all of us!" sang Roger, in a low tone. "Now, I like this chocolate cake best of all."

"Which puts me in mind of a story my mother used to tell," came from Shadow. "Now, hold on, I'm going to tell it, so just sit still and listen. A man went into a bakery run by a couple of elderly maidens. Says he, 'Which is your best cake?' Says the lady behind the counter: 'I like chocolate cake, Angelina likes pound cake, and brother Leander prefers raisin cake. You can take your choice. It was all baked last week, Tuesday, and one is almost as stale as the other.'"

"That's the worst yet," came from Roger, with a groan. "Next time tell something more cheerful."

"Let's have a toast!" suggested Phil. "To

the jolly boys of Oak Hall. And may they never——"

"Be found out when they are having a feast," finished Dave.

"And never want for the wherewith to have another feast," put in Roger.

"And stick to each other through thick and thin!" continued Buster Beggs.

"So say we——"

"All of us!" came in a chorus, and the toast was drunk in root beer and lemonade. Then one of the crowd started to sing one of the school songs, but was promptly hushed by Phil.

"Hold on, we mustn't get Murphy into trouble," said he. "Somebody might——"

"Listen!" came in a whisper from Dave, and he held up his hand.

"What did you hear?" questioned Ben and Roger, in a breath.

"I think I heard somebody moving through the hallway. Wait."

A hat had been placed over the keyhole of the door, to keep the light from streaming into the hall. Without disturbing this, Dave walked through the room to the next dormitory, and opened the door there slowly and noiselessly. A glimpse outside brought to view Chip Macklin on his knees, trying to learn what was going on within No. 12.

Still making no sound, Dave glided up to the sneak and caught him by the collar with one hand and placed the other over Macklin's mouth.

"Don't make a sound, Macklin!" he said in a low tone. "Not a sound unless you want an awful thrashing!"

The sneak was taken completely by surprise and began to shiver. He wanted to cry out, but could not. Dave made him rise, and led him into dormitory No. 11.

"Shut that other door, between the rooms," said Dave to Roger, and the order was quickly obeyed, and the hall door was also closed. Then Chip Macklin was marched to a corner, and confronted by all who were taking part in the feast.

"Now, what have you to say for yourself?" demanded Dave. "Don't talk too loud."

"I—I—it's all a mistake!" whined the sneak.

"You'll find it was a big mistake before we are done with you," said Sam Day, grimly.

"I detest a sneak," added Ben.

"I—I didn't mean any harm."

"You were spying on us, and were going to report us," said Phil.

"Oh, no!"

"I say you were."

"That was certainly his game," said Roger. He turned to Chip Macklin, "Does anybody else know of this?" he questioned, sharply.

"I—I don't know."

"Did you tell Gus Plum?"

"No."

"Let us teach him a lesson," put in one of the other students. "Tie his hands behind him."

This was done, and a minute later some one else took a pillow-case and tied it over Macklin's head, that he might not see.

"Don't—don't smother me," pleaded the sneak.

"We won't smother you, Macklin. Now be still."

"But I wasn't going to do any harm," whined the sneak.

"To play the part of a sneak is bad enough for anybody."

"We ought to duck him in the river," came from one.

"Hang him up by his heels in the gym.," added another.

At these suggestions Chip Macklin gave a deep groan.

"Don't do it—please, don't do it!" he cried. "Let me off this time and I'll never—never spy on you again!"

"That's what you said last spring," answered Phil. "If you had had the chance to-night, you'd have gotten us into a whole lot of trouble."

"I've got an idea," whispered Roger, and then he called all of his companions to one side. A

whispered conversation ensued, lasting several minutes.

"That's an idea!" said Dave, and the others said the same.

Shadow opened the hall door of dormitory No. 11, and announced that the coast was clear. Then Roger faced Macklin once more.

"Now, listen, Macklin," he said sternly. "We are going to teach you a lesson for spying on us. If you report what we do, or what you have seen to-night, you'll be treated ten times worse in the future. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes! But, but——"

"There are no buts to it," added Phil. "You have got to stand for your dose, and that is all there is to it."

"Wha—what are you going to do with me?" quaked the sneak.

"You'll learn soon enough, never fear."

"Please don't duck me in the river. I'll catch my death of cold, and I don't know much about swimming."

"We shan't take you to the river."

"We want to keep the water unpolluted," added Phil.

"And don't—don't hang me up by the heels, please! My head gets so dizzy——"

"Doesn't it get dizzy spying on folks?" asked Dave.

"Away with him to yonder dungeon cell!" came in a deep voice from Buster Beggs. "Chain him to the wall, and let the lean and ravenous rats feast upon his vitals!" And the fat youth struck a stage attitude.

"Hold on, you're stealing Horsehair's stage business," said Sam Day. "That's just the way he recites that address to the Romans."

Two of the boys tiptoed their way into the hall and listened on the stairs. All was dark and silent, for Murphy had long since retired and so had the other monitors and the teachers.

"It looks safe," said one, on returning to the dormitories.

"Come on," answered Roger. "Now, Macklin, take hold of my hand and walk along, and mind you don't make any noise. If you do—well, you'll be mighty sorry, that's all."

In another moment, Roger, Dave, and Phil were out in the hallway, with the sneak between them. The course of the lads was to a rear hallway and then down a long stairs, and through a narrow entry, leading to another stairs.

Macklin shuffled along hesitatingly and they took care that he should not fall on the stairs. "Not a word, mind!" whispered Roger into his ear, and he remained mute, although shivering with fright.

At last the four students stood in the cellar of

Oak Hall, and here Dave lit a bit of candle he had brought along. Then they moved forward again, until they stood before one of the big coal vaults. The door was of heavy wooden slats and unlocked. All marched inside, and the bit of candle was placed on an empty box that was handy.

"'Tis a goodly dungeon, truly," said Phil, in the deepest bass voice he could command.

"And here is the chain," answered Dave, bringing forth a long dog chain he had picked up out of a tool chest in the lower hall.

The chain was tied around one of Macklin's ankles, and then fastened to an iron pipe running along the wall. Then all saw to it that the sneak had his hands still bound tightly behind him.

"Now, Macklin, pleasant dreams, but don't let the rats gobble you up," said Roger.

"Are you going to—to leave me?" cried the sneak, trembling from head to foot.

"Yes. But don't be afraid, we'll come back for you by morning," answered Dave, who did not wish to frighten the lad too much.

The pillow-case was removed from the sneak's head, so that he might breathe freely, and then the other boys ran from the vault, closing the slatted door after them, and shoving a board in front to keep it tight.

"Don't—don't leave me, please don't!" cried

Macklin after them, as the candle-light disappeared from his view.

"We'll be back—don't worry," answered Phil. "A few hours in the dark will do you good. You can reflect upon how mean it is to act the sneak," and then the three passed out of Macklin's hearing.

"I hope it doesn't scare him into a fit," said Dave, as he and Roger and Phil hurried back to the dormitories.

"Don't worry about that," answered Phil. "Macklin is a coward, but he isn't as weak as all that. He wanted to play on our feelings, that was all. It won't hurt him a mite to leave him in the vault until to-morrow morning."

"I wonder if Gus Plum won't go out on a hunt for him."

"My gracious! I never thought of that!" ejaculated Phil. "Sure he'll go out. They occupy the same room."

"In that case Gus Plum may be watching us already."

Without loss of another moment they hurried back to the dormitories. They met nobody and heard nothing to alarm them.

"I reckon we are safe enough—at least, for the time being," said Roger, when they were inside once again. "Come, let us make the most of the feast while it lasts."

CHAPTER XVI

HOW THE FEAST WOUND UP

In less than half an hour the feast was at its height. Each of the students had had his fill of cake, candy, fruits, and drinkables, and all were telling jokes, listening to stories, and doing various "stunts" on the floor, the beds, and on the table and chairs. One lad, who was something of a gymnast, climbed on another's shoulders, while another did a somersault on one of the mattresses. There was likewise a pillow fight, and one student had half a glass of lemonade poured down his back.

"Isn't this great?" asked Roger of Dave.

"It's certainly all right," was Dave's answer. The merriment of his companions pleased him greatly.

"I didn't dream of such a grand reception," said Ben.

"Well, we don't give everybody such a reception. This is something special."

"Oh, for room for more chocolate cake!" came from Buster Beggs.

"Which puts me in mind of something," said

Shadow. "No, it isn't a story this time, it's a fact. Once on a time, when I was a kid of ten, I went to a surprise party. The girl—it was on a girl—loved chocolate cake. Says my ma, 'I'll make you a chocolate cake to take along. Mrs. Jones says Bessie loves chocolate cake so.' So I took the chocolate cake. When I got there I handed in the cake, and found out that Bessie had received fourteen chocolate cakes already. Everybody knew she loved chocolate, and everybody wanted to please her."

"Another black mark for Shadow!" cried Phil. "Now then, who wants the last of this root beer? Don't all speak at once."

"Give it to Shadow," suggested Dave. "He must be dry, telling so many yarns." And to Shadow it went, and he drank it quickly.

"Which puts me in mind," he began, after smacking his lips. "Once on a time——"

"Thanks, some other time," interrupted Roger. "Just gather those bottles together and put them in the box,—and go and get that bottle from the corner of the hall, too."

"I'll get that bottle, Roger," said Dave. He motioned to Phil.

"What's wanted?" whispered the latter, coming forward to the door.

"I'd like to know how Chip Macklin is making out, Phil. Supposing I slip down and see?"

"All right—but don't let him go free."

"I won't—unless he's frightened to death."

"Want me to go along?"

"As you please."

The two boys slipped out into the dark hallway, and side by side made their way to the stairs leading into the big cellar.

"There's a light down there!" cried Dave, as they opened the door. "Somebody besides Macklin is there!"

"Perhaps it's Gus Plum!"

"That's true."

The boys came to a halt, and by listening intently made out a low mumble of two voices.

"Let us listen and learn what they are saying," said Phil. "It's fair enough—after what Macklin tried to do."

With caution they descended to the cellar bottom and tiptoed their way toward the coal vault.

"Yes, sir, but I—I don't dare to tell," reached them, in the quivering voice of the sneak. "If I do the—they'll kill me!"

"Unless you tell me just what this means, Master Macklin, I shall leave you here," was the reply, and to the amazement of Dave and Phil it came in Job Haskers's voice. "I have been made a fool of—but never mind that. It is lucky for you that I came back at this time of the night and heard you calling in your fright. Now, tell me

what's at the bottom of it all. Who put you here?"

"Why—er—some of the students."

"What students?"

"Oh, sir, I—I really don't dare to tell," whined the sneak.

"And I demand an answer to my question!" thundered Job Haskers.

"Well, you see, some of them were having a spread—a blow-out, you know——"

"A blow-out?"

"Yes, sir—something to eat and to drink, in their dormitory. I stopped at the door to find out what was up, and they captured me and put me down here."

"What dormitory was that?"

"Oh, sir—I—I——"

"If you do not answer, I shall have you punished severely, Macklin. Come, answer, and no more nonsense!" And the assistant teacher shook his long finger menacingly at the sneak.

"If I tell you, sir—you won't—won't let them know, will you?"

"I shall not mention your name."

"They were the boys in dormitory No. 12—and some from No. 11, too."

"Are they having their feast yet?"

"I suppose so. But, oh, Mr. Haskers——"

"I shall look into this, and without delay."

" Please set me free first, and give me a chance to get back to my room."

" Very well," and Job Haskers began to work over the dog chain with which the sneak was fastened to the iron pipe.

In the meantime Dave and Phil had heard enough. Noiselessly they withdrew to the upper hall once more. This done, they skipped upstairs two steps at a time and rushed into the dormitory.

" The jig is up, fellows," cried Dave. " Out of sight with everything, and get to bed just as fast as you can! "

" What have you learned? " asked Roger.

" Job Haskers is back, and somehow he heard Macklin in the cellar and went to him," answered Phil. " Macklin just told him that we were having a spread."

Very rapidly all the evidences of the feast were shoved out of sight. What to do with the box of root-beer bottles nobody at first knew.

" Here, tie them to this," said Dave, producing a bit of fishing line, and by this means the box was suspended from the catch of one of the window blinds. The rubbish was cast out of the window and the breeze that was blowing soon carried it from sight. Then the students undressed, rearranged their beds, turned out the light, and crawled under the covers.

Scarcely had the boys settled themselves than

there came swift footsteps through the hallway, and the door to dormitory No. 12 was opened by Job Haskers. Behind the assistant stood Dr. Clay, clad in a dressing gown and slippers.

The assistant turned on the light, and then gazed about him in a dismayed fashion. He had anticipated finding all in disorder. As it was, not even a chair was out of place. He turned to one clothes closet after another, but nothing unusual met his view.

"What do you find, Mr. Haskers?" asked the doctor, in rather a hard tone of voice. The master of the school did not relish being aroused out of a sound sleep to look after his pupils.

"Why—er—this appears to be in order," stammered the second assistant.

"So I should say myself,—and all of the boys appear to be asleep," added the doctor, and listened to the heavy breathing and the snoring.

"They may be shamming."

Job Haskers walked from one bed to another and gazed keenly at each occupant. Dave felt like laughing outright, but managed to keep a sober face, and continued to snore as if he was enjoying the soundest sleep of his life.

From dormitory No. 12, the assistant and Dr. Clay passed to No. 11, only to find the same orderly appearance and the same apparent sleepers.

"*X* goes into *b* minus 12*bz*——" murmured

Buster Beggs, as if talking in his sleep. "Oh, what a sum to do! 24*a* plus *ab* square——" and the rest was lost in a mumble.

"He is certainly asleep," was the worthy doctor's comment. "His algebra has been too much for him."

The assistant did not reply, but gazed into some more of the clothes closets, only to find everything in perfect order. Then he looked under the beds and tables.

"Well?" demanded the doctor, in even a harder voice than that previously employed.

"I—do not seem to find anything wrong, sir," admitted the second assistant, humbly.

"Then your informant must have been mistaken."

"Well, there was no mistake about his being where I found him," returned Job Haskers, grimly.

"It was some small lark, probably, and the boy magnified it," was Dr. Clay's answer, as he stalked into the hall again. A moment later he and the assistant took their departure.

For fully a minute the dormitories remained perfectly silent—each boy straining his ears to catch the sounds of the retreating footsteps; then one cover after another was flung back and all sat up.

"Are they gone," whispered Sam Day.

"They are," answered Roger.

"We've had a close shave of it," remarked Dave. "We didn't get into bed any too quick."

"Be careful," came guardedly from Ben. "They may come back."

Hardly daring to breathe, the boys arose and several gazed out into the hall and remained on guard. While they did this, others put away such things as had not yet found their proper places.

"What a beautiful snore you did give, Dave," said Phil, with a little laugh.

"And I had this under my back, too," answered Dave, and held up an empty soda water bottle.

"What got me was Buster doing algebra in his sleep," came from Shadow. "I felt like roaring right out. Put me in mind of a story our old hired man used to tell me of a——"

"No more to-night," came from Sam Day. "Clean up, and go to bed, before we spoil it all by being pinched."

"I don't know that we are out of this yet," said one of the other pupils. "Remember, Macklin was found in the cellar, just as old Haskers said."

"That sneak ought to be made to leave the school," came from another. "So long as he remains here he will do his best to spoil all our fun."

At that instant one of the boys in the hall came back into the dormitory.

"More steps on the stairs and coming this way!" he announced. "Better get to bed and stay there!"

"Right you are," returned Roger. "Is everything all right?"

"Here's a piece of layer cake if anybody wants it," came from Phil.

"Layer away until another day," said Roger, and gave a yawn. "To tell the truth, I'm sleepy."

"That pun is enough to make anybody tired," retorted Phil. "Where did you get it from, the ark?"

"Just 'ark to that now!" interposed Dave.

"Worse and worse!" came from several. "Come, let's get to bed."

And in a few minutes more all were sleeping soundly, as if nothing out of the usual order had occurred.

CHAPTER XVII

A "ROUGH HOUSE" AND A CAPTURE

THE boys of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 fully expected to be brought up for examination on the following day, but much to their relief nothing of the sort occurred. Chip Macklin was asked a few questions by the doctor, but the master of the Hall knew of the pupil's sneaking tendencies and was in small humor to cater to them.

"I have examined into this," said Dr. Clay. "Both Mr. Haskers and myself found the boys in bed and their dormitories in good condition. You have evidently been misinformed, or otherwise you are exaggerating. You may go." And the sneak departed, utterly out of sorts, both with himself and all those around him. Not long after he sought out Gus Plum, to whom he had told his story during the night.

"How did you make out with the old man?" inquired the bully of Oak Hall.

"Didn't make out at all," grumbled Macklin, throwing himself down on a chair. "I'm sick and tired of this, Gus."

"Isn't he going to punish those chaps?"

"He says he visited the rooms and found everything all right and the fellows in bed. I can't understand it."

"They must have got wind of the old man's coming. More than likely they had a guard out, —and Murphy must have been standing in with them."

"Job Haskers was sent off on a wild-goose chase. He didn't mention the particulars, but I fancy that message he got was a bogus one."

"We must get square on them for the way they treated you, Chip."

"I'd like to do it," answered the sneak, brightening. "What would you do, if you were me?" he added.

"I don't know. Tell you what we might do; steal all their school books. They'd be sure to miss some lessons, and as they are such a studious lot, that would worry them a good bit."

"That's good enough, but I want to do more. It was no small thing to lock a fellow in the cellar in the dark, and remember, I wasn't more than half dressed at that."

"We might rough-house their dormitories," suggested Gus Plum. "That would rile 'em up, I know, especially if we did it on Saturday, just before inspection."

"Now, you're talking!" cried Macklin. "Will you help me do it?"

"Sure," and then and there a plan was laid to "rough-house" dormitories Nos. 11 and 12. The expression meant to disarrange everything the rooms contained. In some schools this is called "stacking," but at Oak Hall it was "rough-housing" or "jumbling."

The bully of the school had mentioned Saturday as the day for this work, for then it was that each dormitory was inspected by Andrew Dale, the head assistant, to see that all was in proper condition for the Sabbath. The dormitories were cleaned and dusted by the maids, but the pupils themselves had to keep everything in order. A failure to do this caused all in the dormitory to be marked down in their averages.

True to his promise made to Mr. Wadsworth and Professor Potts, Dave was studying hard, and, if he was not at the head of his class, he was close to it. As yet certain features of academy life were strange to him, but he was becoming settled rapidly.

"He's a staver," said Roger to Ben. "He works hard, and plays hard, and he is at one thing or another from morning till night."

"That's the kind I like," answered Ben. "Dave is the best kind of a chum. He'll do whatever he can for you."

"Oh, I like him myself—and I'll never forget what he did for my family."

"Have you heard anything further of that thief?"

"Not a whisper. I guess he has gotten away for good."

As was their usual custom, the boys of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 spent an hour Friday evening in putting their apartments in order. Suits were brushed and hung away, shoes were polished, rugs put down straight, and books and papers arranged in their proper order.

"I'll wager there isn't a dormitory in the school in better order than this one," was Phil's remark, after the task was finished.

"Do Plum and his crowd keep their room in any kind of shape?" questioned Dave.

"I don't think so, although I never go in it. There was a row over the room last spring, because some cigarettes and playing cards were found there. The doctor won't permit smoking, drinking, or card-playing."

"Which puts me in mind of a story I heard an engineer tell," came from Shadow. "An expert engineer wanted a certain job, and had to go before a board of examiners. He was asked if he could do this, that, and the other, and said yes. Then they asked him if he drank. 'You bet I do,' said the engineer. 'How much?' was the next question. 'Oh, not over a dozen glasses a day.' 'You can't have the job—we don't want a man

who drinks.' 'But all of you drink,' said the engineer. 'I do not," answered the head of the examiners. 'You do.' 'Only water, coffee, and soft drinks.' 'That's what I drink, too,' said the engineer—and got the job."

"Well, Plum drinks something stronger than that," said Roger. "I've seen him do it. He ought to have been reported, but I am not the one to play the sneak."

It was a beautiful night, and all the boys, after cleaning up the dormitories went outside, to the playground or the river. They remained out until it was time to retire.

The light in the upper hall was turned low, so none of the lads noticed anything unusual on first entering the dormitories. Then Dave, who was in advance, stumbled over an upset chair and fell upon a bed spring. Phil followed and bumped into several trunks, piled one on top of the other.

"Hold on—something is wrong!" cried Dave, and turned on the light. "Well, I declare!"

"Somebody has rough-housed us right enough!" came from Phil, as he gazed around in dismay. "What a mess!"

And mess it truly was. Every bed had been taken apart, and the tops, bottoms, sides, springs, mattresses, and bedclothing were in a tangled heap in the center of the floor. On top were piled an

open trunk and some school books, and on the books was perched a quart bottle of black ink, ready to tip over at the slightest touch. Beside the beds was an upturned table, with rugs and chairs on top, and mixed in with them suits of clothing, collars, shirts, socks, neckties, and a hundred and one other things. Every toothbrush and hairbrush had been daubed with ink or mucilage, and mucilage had been placed on the band of every hat and cap. Over the bare floor were strewn the contents of several boxes of tacks, and an armful of straw from the stable.

"This is Chip Macklin's work," came from Roger. "I'll wager a hundred dollars on it!"

"He never did this alone," came from Sam Day. "Gus Plum must have helped him."

"I vote we go and catch Macklin and make him straighten this out," put in Buster Beggs. "Why, such a rough house as this will take all night to fix up."

One or two of the boys wanted to report to the master of the Hall, but this was quickly voted down by the others.

"We can attend to our own troubles," said Phil. "But we ought to make sure if Macklin and Plum did it."

"I'm going to play the spy and see," declared Roger. "That is, if you fellows will start in to fix up here without me."

"All right, go ahead, Roger," came from several.

"I've got an idea," said Dave. "If you'll spare me, I'll go with Roger. Perhaps we can capture those chaps."

"Hurrah! Just the thing!" cried Polly Vane. He rarely took part in the discussions, but to have the room mussed up ruffled him greatly.

The bottle of ink was taken down and placed in a corner, and the majority of the lads set to work to clean up the dormitories. In the meantime Dave and Roger slipped off, and hid themselves in two dark corners of the hall.

They had not long to wait. But a few minutes had passed when they beheld Macklin and Gus Plum sneaking towards dormitories No. 11 and No. 12. Each tiptoed his way to one of the doors and tried to peep through the keyhole.

"Now is our time," whispered Dave. "You take the sneak and I'll tackle Gus Plum."

"Can you manage him? He's pretty big."

"I think I can. Come."

Both moved forward like shadows, and a few seconds later Gus Plum and Macklin found themselves caught from behind and hurled against the doors.

"Open up, fellows!" cried Dave, and as the doorknob was turned, the barrier flew open and Gus Plum pitched headlong, with Dave on top of

him. Macklin also went down, and was made a prisoner with ease. Then both doors were closed and locked once more.

"Hi, let up!" cried Gus Plum, when he could speak. "Let up, do you hear?"

"Stop your racket, Plum," said Dave in a low but intense tone. "If you don't——"

"We'll all pile on and fix you," finished Sam Day.

"I—I don't know what you mean by treating me so," stammered the bully, as Dave allowed him to rise.

"Don't you?" sneered Phil. "Just look around and you'll understand."

"I—I didn't have anything to do with this," put in Chip Macklin, in a shivering voice.

"Who has been rough-housing you?" asked the bully, with a pretended look of surprise.

"You and Macklin," answered Phil, boldly. "You needn't deny it."

There was a pause, and the bully and the sneak looked at each other. How had their guilty secret leaked out?

"We ought to give you a hard drubbing for this," came from Roger.

"I suppose you will—since you are twelve to two," answered the bully of Oak Hall.

"We'll let you go under one condition," said Dave, after a few words with his chums.

"What condition?" questioned Macklin, eagerly.

"That you go to work and place everything exactly as you found it."

"Pooh! do you suppose I am going to play nigger for you!" ejaculated Gus Plum.

"You'll do that, or take the consequences."

"Let us fix the rooms, Gus," came from the sneak. "I—I don't want them to—to——"

"Oh, shut up, Chip!" interposed the bully, in disgust. "I am not going to lift my hand, so there!" he added, defiantly.

"He's too hot-headed to last," came from one of the students. "Let's hang him out of the window by the heels."

"I've got a good mustard plaster handy," said another. "I think to apply that to his neck, just where his collar comes, would bring him around."

"Or else place a bit of ice on his feet," came from another, and he held up the chunk from the water pitcher.

"You can't scare me," replied the bully. "I won't help fix up the room, so there!"

At that moment came a loud knock on the door, which caused all of the students to start in alarm.

CHAPTER XVIII

FEATHERS AND MOLASSES

"It's Job Haskers!"

"If it is, we are in a pickle and no mistake, fellows!"

"Let us face the music and tell the truth," said Phil, and walked to the door and opened it cautiously.

Fortunately for the students of dormitories No. 11 and 12, it was not the second assistant, but Murphy the monitor. He looked in and grinned.

"Rough house, eh?" he whispered. "I thought something was wrong. When did it happen?"

"Some time after supper."

"All right, fix it up and be quiet, and I won't say anything."

"Is Haskers coming around?" asked Roger.

"Not to-night. He has a toothache."

"Bless that toothache," said Buster Beggs, softly; and then the door closed, and the monitor walked off.

"So that's the way Murphy does," sneered Gus

Plum. "I've suspected right along that he stood in with you fellows."

"Don't say a word against Murphy," came from Dave. "He is worth a dozen bullies like you, and a hundred such sneaks as Macklin."

"Don't you call me a bully!" retorted Plum, hotly.

"I shall call you that, Plum. And please remember that I have not forgotten that happening on the river," continued Dave.

"Nor have I forgotten it," came simultaneously from Roger and Phil.

"It was your own fault."

"We won't talk about that now," went on Dave. "The question is, are you going to work or not?" and he looked from Plum to Macklin.

"I'll do what I can," whined the sneak. He was afraid the crowd would set upon him and beat him mercilessly.

"Don't you do it," came from the bully. "They can't prove that we had a hand in this."

"Oh, so you acknowledge it," said Ben, quickly. "I must say it's a fine way in which to treat a new fellow like myself."

"Humph! You don't want to be friends," sneered Gus Plum.

"I certainly don't want to be a friend to a bully or a sneak," answered Ben. "I like to pick my company."

"So you won't work to put these rooms into order," said Phil. "That means that you'd rather take the consequences." He paused suggestively.

"I'll work—I'll work!" cried Macklin.

"Then get at it at once!" cried Roger, and the sneak set to work without delay, several of the others helping. He labored with a will, until the perspiration rolled down his face, and soon all the beds were up again and the furniture of the dormitories set where it belonged.

In the meantime Gus Plum was forced into one of the closets and the door was locked upon him. Then half a dozen of the students withdrew to a corner for consultation.

"We've got to get square—no two ways about that," declared Roger. "The only question is, now?"

"Might put him in the cellar, as we did Macklin."

"We could jumble their room, if it wasn't for the other fellows in it," suggested one of the crowd.

"He ought to have a coat of tar and feathers," declared Sam Day. "Just look at the work still to be done here!"

"Lazy is right," answered Dave, and then he smiled oddly. "That puts me in mind of a story I heard——"

"Great Cæsar, he's stealing Shadow's fireworks!" burst out Phil.

"I apologize to Shadow," answered Dave, with a low bow to the lad mentioned. "This is only an idea. It happened at a college in New Jersey. They tarred and feathered a fellow there, but the tar was—molasses!"

"Eureka!" shouted Roger. "Dave has hit the head on the nail, as the tinker said to the iceman. Molasses it is, and good and thick."

The matter was discussed for a few minutes, and Sam Day and Shadow volunteered to get the molasses, which was kept in a big jug in the kitchen pantry. They were gone fifteen minutes, and returned with a big tin dipper brimming full of the sticky fluid.

"Here's the tar, boys!" he said, in a loud voice, so that Gus Plum might hear, and he winked. "All we've got to do is to heat it up."

"We can do that over Lazy's pocket stove," answered Roger. "Now, boys, for some feathers."

"Tar and feathers!" murmured Macklin, turning pale. "Don't—don't tar and feather me, please, don't!"

"Then hurry up and finish your job," came from one of the students, and the sneak bent to his task with more of a will than ever.

One of the pillows was opened and a quantity

of feathers taken therefrom. Then Gus Plum was allowed to come from the closet.

"Now, Plum, you wouldn't do as ordered," said Phil, "so you have got to take the consequences!"

"All right, do your worst!" muttered the bully, defiantly.

"Then you like tar and feathers?" questioned Dave.

"You ain't going to tar and feather me!" howled Gus Plum. "You wouldn't dare to do it!"

"Won't we dare?" said Roger. "Just wait and see."

"Take off his coat, vest, and shirt," came from another. "And then blindfold him."

"I won't stand it," ejaculated the bully, and now he was thoroughly alarmed. "Let me go, do you hear? If you don't, I'll yell."

"Gag him!" ordered Phil, and in a twinkling a cloth gag was forced into the bully's mouth, and a handkerchief was tied over it. Then the fellow was stripped to the waist, and his hands were fastened behind his back.

In the meantime the molasses had been warmed over the pocket stove mentioned. It was smeared on with a whisk broom, and Gus Plum groaned and tried to break away, feeling certain it was tar. Over the molasses went the feathers.

"My! but he's a bird!" remarked Sam Day.

"Say, Plum, you ought to hire out in a dime museum," said another. "They can advertise you as the curio from Borneo—half man and half bird. It will bring you a fortune."

"He'll never get that tar off, never," murmured Macklin. "Oh, this is awful!"

"Keep quiet, unless you want a dose," said Roger, and the sneak ceased speaking instantly.

The bully was in a terrible state of mind, and he was now sorry that he had not helped Macklin to rearrange the dormitories and thus escape the dose just given him.

"I'll make them pay for this—just wait and see!" was what he told himself.

"Now, Plum, listen to me," said Phil, after the work was accomplished and the fellow was a mass of molasses and feathers. "Don't you dare to report this. If you do, we'll make Oak Hall too hot to hold you."

"And don't you dare to say a word," added Dave, to Macklin.

"I—I won't open my mouth," whined the sneak.

"Have the rooms been put into shape?" asked Roger.

"Just about," answered Sam Day. "The rest we'll have to do ourselves." He referred to the

sorting out of the clothing, shoes, books, and papers.

"Did Macklin pick up those tacks?"

"Yes, and the straw, too."

"Then what do you say—shall we let them go?"

"Yes," came from nearly all the others.

"Very well then, out you go!" cried Phil, and opened the door. He pushed Gus Plum headlong into the hall, and Roger flung Macklin after him.

"Now get to your room!" cried Dave. "And mind you, mum's the word, or you'll regret it."

"Yes, you'll regret it," came from some of the others, and then the door was closed and locked, and the students turned their attention to putting the dormitories into proper condition once more. It was quite a task, in spite of what had already been done, and it took them an hour and more.

"I don't want any more rough-housing in mine," remarked Dave. "It's too much of a nuisance." His collar and cuffs were gone, and he did not find them until the next morning. They were in a closet, and a big screw eye had been put through the holes, thus fastening them securely to the wall.

While the boys were finishing up, Gus Plum and Macklin sneaked through the hallway and paused at the door to their own dormitory.

"Don't go in—yet," muttered the bully, who had had the gag removed.

"Why not?" asked the sneak, in surprise.

"They may—may laugh at us. I don't want to be laughed at."

"Where are you going?"

"To the bathroom, to try to get rid of this mess. Come along."

Macklin would have preferred going to bed, but he did not dare to refuse the bully's request. Both hurried to one of the bathrooms, and there the bully discovered that molasses and not tar had been used. At this he breathed a sigh of relief.

"I knew they wouldn't dare to use tar," he said, loftily, while washing the sticky stuff off.

"You're certainly lucky."

"You were a fool to do any work, Chip."

"Well, I didn't want to be killed."

"Rats! You give in too easily. I'm not afraid of that whole crowd," went on Gus Plum.

"I didn't do so very much. I only pretended to keep busy. They did most of the work."

"I shouldn't have lifted my hand, even if they had killed me! I hate them!" added the bully, fiercely.

"What are you going to do next?"

"I don't know yet, but I'll square up, don't you forget that!" was the bitter reply.

"We won't dare to say a word to Dr. Clay——"

"Bah! It wouldn't do any good—the doctor is too anxious to keep his students, so long as they pay. No, Chip, we've got to look out for ourselves. You can see how the old man treated you when you went to him."

It took nearly an hour's work to get rid of the molasses and feathers, and by that time the sneak was thoroughly sleepy.

"Come on and go to bed," he yawned. "I'm sick of it all."

As they passed into the hall they heard footsteps in the rear, and in a moment more they were confronted by Andrew Dale.

"Why, boys, what does this mean?" asked the head assistant, pleasantly. "I thought you were in bed long ago."

"We had to get up," answered Gus Plum, smoothly. "Macklin was taken sick—had the nose-bleed, and I went to the bathroom with him."

"I see. And how is the nose now, Master Macklin?"

"It's all right now, sir—but it did bleed dreadfully.

"Did you hit on anything?"

"No, sir, it just started to bleed of itself. It often does that, but not quite so hard as it did tonight."

"It bled so hard Macklin said he felt dizzy, that's why I went to the bathroom with him," put in the bully of Oak Hall.

"Perhaps we had better have a doctor look into this——"

"No, never mind, Mr. Dale, it's all right now," answered the sneak, quickly. "I don't mind it so very much, anyway—it makes my head feel clearer."

"Yes, it will sometimes do that. Should it get worse, let me know," said Andrew Dale, and passed on to his room.

"What a close call," muttered the bully of the school, and pinched his companion's arm. "Come now, before we meet anybody else." And then they entered their dormitory.

CHAPTER XIX

A GAME OF FOOTBALL

For a week following the feast matters moved along quietly at Oak Hall. Once Dave encountered Gus Plum, and a few sharp words passed, but that was all. It was the calm before the storm.

During that week Dave did his best with his studies, resolved that good times should not interfere with his average.

"I've got to come out at the top, or pretty close to it," he told himself. "If I do not, it won't be fair to Mr. Wadsworth. He sent me here to study, not to play."

As autumn came on many of the students of the academy turned their attention to football, and several teams were organized and a number of matches were played. Roger was the captain of one of the teams and he urged Dave to take part.

"You've got to learn all about football," said the senator's son. "Even if you don't play you want to know what is being done."

"Baseball is the game I love," answered Dave. Nevertheless he took up football, and it was not

long before he could play fairly well. He was a good runner, and could dodge as neatly as anybody, and these accomplishments counted for a good deal.

A few miles further up the Leming River was the town of Rockville, where was located the Rockville Military Academy, an institution not quite as large as Oak Hall. Between the two institutions there was a constant and keen rivalry, and the football season was at its height when a challenge was received from Rockville to play on a Saturday afternoon at three o'clock.

"I knew it would come," said Roger, as he read the challenge aloud. "Now, fellows, we must show them what we can do."

"Did you play them last year?" asked Dave.

"Yes, three games. They won two and we won one."

"Then their team must be better than ours was."

"We lost two players by sickness at the last moment," put in Phil. "That made us lose the third game."

The team to play the Rockville Institution was placed under Roger's control, and he picked his players with great care. Ben, he knew, was a good football player, and was made quarterback, while Phil was a halfback. Much to Dave's surprise Sam Day was put in as right tackle.

"Can Lazy fill that place?" asked Ben, in wonder.

"Certainly," answered Roger, promptly. "You have never seen him wake up. When he does, he is as spry as anybody." And so it proved.

Roger wished very much to put Dave on the team, but the latter declined.

"I couldn't do it justice, yet," said the boy from the country. "You must give me time." Yet Dave went along as a substitute.

The day for the game dawned bright and clear, and the students of Oak Hall left for Rockville directly after dinner. Some went in boats and some in the stage, and the carryall, while a few rode bicycles or walked. With them went Andrew Dale, who was almost as interested as the boys themselves.

Taken as a whole, the crowd was a happy one. The only discontented students were those who had failed to get on the team, and among these were Gus Plum, Macklin, and a red-headed lad named Puffers.

"It wasn't fair to leave us on the outside," grumbled Puffers. "Every one of us ought to be on that team."

"Oh, I didn't expect any better treatment from Roger Morr," declared the bully of the school. "He is running this to suit himself."

"I'll bet our school loses this match," put in

Macklin. "And if it does, it will serve those fellows right." He was not loyal enough to wish Oak Hall success if he could have no part in the victory.

"Morr and Porter and Lawrence are trying to run everything to suit themselves," grumbled Puffers. "It's an outrage."

"They shan't run things very much longer," declared Plum. "I'll show them that we have rights which they are bound to respect."

So the talk ran on among the discontented ones until the football field at Rockville was reached. Gus Plum and his friends had come up on their wheels, which they left at the hotel shed.

"Come and have something on me," said the bully, and led the way to a back room of the hotel. Puffers was willing, and the sneak of the school did not have will power enough to resist. Drinks were ordered, and then Gus Plum passed around a package of cigarettes.

"This is something like," declared the bully, blowing some smoke towards the ceiling. "For all I care their football game can go to grass."

"I'm with you on that," answered Puffers. He had very little spending money of his own, and was quite willing to sponge on Gus Plum to the full extent of the latter's purse.

In the meantime the other students had gone to the football field. The little stand there was al-

ready half filled and they quickly crowded into the remaining seats. The Rockville boys gave them a cheer, and they cheered the rival academy in return. Flags were waving on all sides, and many of the boys were tooting loudly on the horns they had brought along.

Each football team had a uniform, and the rivals made a neat appearance when they ran out on the field, to indulge in a little practice.

"Now, fellows, do your best!" cried Dave, who was waving a small flag.

Soon the practicing came to a finish and the game proper began. It was Rockville's kick-off, and they sent the ball thirty-five yards into Oak Hall's territory in almost the time it takes to tell it.

"Hurrah! look at that!" came from the Military Academy boys. "This is our game, sure! Keep up the good work!"

"Keep cool, fellows," came quietly from Roger. "Watch 'em."

But little was said, for after the first scrimmage the ball was carried back and forth with great rapidity, so fast, in fact, that Dave could scarcely follow the various plays made. He saw Phil with the ball, then Roger, and later on saw Sam Day make a run of twenty-five yards, at which the Oak Hall crowd cheered loudly. The leather went down into the territory of Rockville six times, only to be sent back, and then it was carried almost to

the Oak Hall goal line. There was a furious struggle here, and at last it was snatched up for a safety, just as one of the Rockville players tried his best to cross the line.

"Hurrah, that's better than nothing!" was the cry from the Military Academy boys. "That counts two, anyway." And then they began to cheer, blow their horns, and swing their rattles.

It had taken twenty minutes to make the safety, so fifteen minutes of the first half still remained. The ball was put into play once more without delay, and again it went up and down the field almost as rapidly as before.

"Their team is heavier than ours," said Polly Vane to Dave.

"That is true, but I think our fellows can outrun them," was the answer.

Back and forth went the leather, now for five yards, then for ten, and then for a long run by one of the Oak Hall players, which took it within fifteen yards of the opponents' goal. The Oak Hall followers cheered madly.

"Over with it! Make it a touchdown!"

"Kick it! Make it a goal!"

There was a wild scramble, and then another rush, followed by a mix-up which nobody could describe, afterward.

"A foul! A foul!" cried both sides, and it was hard to get a proper decision. But the ref-

eree, after consulting the linesman, did the best he could, which was to shift the ball five yards from where it had been before. One Rockville player had had his shoulder hurt, and two Oak Hall players went limping from the field with sprained ankles.

But five minutes more of the first half remained for playing, and as quickly as possible three substitutes came into the field, to take the places of those disabled. Of the two called for Oak Hall one was Luke Watson.

"Now, Luke, give 'em music!" cried Dave, to the boy who loved to play the banjo and guitar.

"I'll do what I can," answered Luke, and took his place on the field.

In a moment more the ball was again in play, and almost before the spectators knew what was coming, a Rockville man had it and forced it the length of the field for a touchdown.

"A touchdown! A touchdown!" was the cheer. And a yell went up, which changed to a perfect roar when a goal was kicked. Then the bell rang, bringing the first half of the game to a close.

Score, Rockville Academy 8, Oak Hall 0.

It must be confessed that the boys of Oak Hall felt much downcast, and the team had but little to say as it sped for the dressing room.

"This is the time Oak Hall gets whitewashed,"

said one of the Military Academy students. "They don't know how to play."

"Wait—the game isn't ended yet," answered an Oak Hall youth.

So the talk ran on, while Dave and a number of others tried to cheer the players up. In the midst of the talk Gus Plum pushed his way into the dressing room, followed by Puffers and Macklin.

"Why ain't you fellows doing something?" cried the bully. "You're putting up a regular baby game."

"I could do as well blindfolded," added Puffers.

"If I couldn't do better than that, I wouldn't accept a challenge," put in Macklin, with a sickly squint at Roger.

"I don't want any advice from you," said the senator's son, warmly. "If you want to do me a favor, please leave this dressing room."

Gus Plum and his cohorts wanted to argue the point, but nobody was in the humor for listening, and the bully and his friends were soon forced out of the place. Then the ten minutes' intermission came to an end, and the team took its place once more on the gridiron, or rather checkerboard, as it must in the future be called, since most of it is now marked off into five-yard squares instead of lines as formerly.

The ball had been in play less than two minutes when there came a bad fumble on the part of

a Rockville player. It was Oak Hall's opportunity. Phil seized the ball, and like a flash made a dash of fifteen yards with it. Then came a pause, when it was passed back to Roger, who was off like the wind with it.

"Look at that run!"

"Go it, Morr, go it!"

"A touchdown! A touchdown!"

The cry was true, Roger had crossed the line, just as the left tackle of the Military Academy was doing his best to down him. How the Oak Hall lads did cheer!

"Now for a goal! Don't miss that kick."

But to kick a goal just then was not so easy. A sudden stiff breeze was blowing, and this sent the ball just to the outside of the left goal post.

"No goal to-day!" shouted a follower of the Rockville team.

"Never mind, that gives us five points anyway," answered one of the students from Oak Hall.

The score was now Rockville Academy 8, Oak Hall 5, and there remained but twelve minutes for playing. As the ball came out once more one of the substitutes came to Roger.

"Roger, I can't play any more," he said. "I've got cramps in my left side."

"Then call Dave Porter," was Roger's quick reply, and as soon as possible Dave discarded the

sweater he had been wearing, came on the field, and was assigned to a position.

The players on both sides were now excited, and no sooner had the ball been put into play again than there came several fumbles. The ball went up and down, and far over to the side line. Then came a long punt by Dave. The center for Oak Hall caught it, and made twenty yards before he was brought down. The play was decidedly rough, and for just a moment there was an indication of a fight.

"Don't you try anything like that again," said Roger, to one of the Rockville players.

"Oh, that was all right," growled the fellow who had been too rough.

The play was resumed, and by really hard work Oak Hall advanced to within twenty yards of the opponents' goal line.

"That's it!" came the yell. "Carry it over."

"Kick a goal!"

"Get the ball, Rockville. Don't let them make another touchdown!"

In the midst of the clamor the linesman came forward and announced that there remained but six minutes more in which to play.

"We must win!" said Dave, to Roger. "I think we can do it, too. Those Rockville fellows look played out."

But Rockville got the ball, and the signal was

given with care. They made twelve yards, and then eight yards more, but lost the ball on a wild pass. It rolled toward Dave, and he caught it up like a flash and started to run.

"Go it, Porter, go it!" was the cry of encouragement.

"Stop him!" came the counter-cry from the Rockville rooters. "Down him, quick!"

A Rockville tackle threw himself forward. But Dave made a jump and cleared the fellow and continued on his way. Another opponent was coming up from the other side, but Phil was between, and blocked him off.

"Go it, Porter; go it, old man!"

"Keep at it! You are making the run of your life!"

Three of the Rockville team were now after him, and one at his very heels. But he was fresh, while they were fagged out, and do their best they could not catch him. Like the wind he came over the goal line.

"Whoop! hurrah!" was the wild cry, and then the horns and rattles made such a din as was never heard before. As quickly as possible a goal was kicked, and again the ball went into play. It was advanced fifteen yards into Rockville's territory when the whistle blew, and the contest came to an end.

CHAPTER XX

A SUPPER AND A SNAPPING TURTLE

"OAK HALL wins the game!"

"Say, but that was a great run by Porter!"

"Hello, Rockville, how do you feel now?"

Such were some of the cries uttered after the game came to a finish, the majority of the remarks being completely lost in the wild cheering and noise of the horns and rattles.

The Military Academy players were much crestfallen over the defeat and left the grounds as quickly as possible. The Oak Hall boys were surrounded by their chums, and many were the handshakes and back-pattings.

"Boys, you did remarkably well," said Andrew Dale, with a warm smile. "I am proud of you, and I know that Dr. Clay will be proud, too. I am sorry there was any roughness, but I honestly think your opponents were more to blame than yourselves."

"They were," answered Roger. "I had to warn them to be careful, and the referee warned them, too."

"Say, Dave, don't you ever tell me that you

can't play football," came from Ben, as he hurried up. "That run was a dandy."

"I didn't do much at real playing," answered Dave. "I just got hold of the ball, and I knew there was nothing to do but to dodge and run for it. Anybody could have done that."

"Not everybody," put in Phil. "They were after you hot-footed."

"And did you see him leap clear over Pryor," said Buster Beggs. "Say, Dave, you ought to go in for high-jumping, when we have our field-day."

"I used to jump over the rail fences on the farm," answered Dave, with a laugh.

It was a happy crowd of schoolboys that left the football field and crowded into the dressing room. Outside the followers of Oak Hall still kept up their cheering and noise-making.

The only persons who did not enthuse over the victory were Gus Plum, Macklin, and Puffers.

"It was a fluke," said the bully of the school. "Porter got the leather by the merest accident."

"Of course it was a fluke," added Puffers. "Rockville put up the better play right through!"

"Those chaps will have the swelled head after this," came from Macklin. "You won't be able to touch 'em with a ten-foot pole."

"Let us organize a team of our own," suggested

Puffers. "We have as much right to play as they have." To this the others instantly agreed, but when it came to getting the boys together they found they could muster but nine players, so the scheme fell through.

It was too late to return to Oak Hall before supper time, so, by an arrangement made beforehand, the crowd was divided into several parties, each to take supper at a hotel or boarding house in Rockville. The students of the football team kept together, and with them went half a dozen of their intimate friends. All felt in high spirits, and the conversation was an animated one, filled with talks of punts, fumbles, charging, scrimmages, kick-offs, and the like, terms well known to the initiated, but like so much Greek to those who do not follow the game.

"After this Rockville won't crow so much," said Roger.

"They were pretty nice fellows, anyway," said Dave. "They got excited and that made them rough."

The party was to take supper at the largest hotel of which the town boasted. The hostelry was pretty well filled, but a special table had been set in the dining room for the football players and their chums.

"This is just all right," said Buster Beggs, as they sat down to the well-filled table. "My, but

a game gives a fellow an appetite, eh?" And he began to eat with vigor.

As was to be expected, the high spirits of the students could not be controlled, and many were the tricks played at the table. Shadow Hamilton had some sugar poured down inside his collar, "just to make him sweet," as was declared, and Dave had his fish so well peppered that the first mouthful brought tears to his eyes.

"Phew! but this is hot!" he cried, reaching for a glass of water.

"Dave wants his fish to swim!" cried Roger. "All right, my boy, go ahead."

"Say, who put mustard in my tea?" demanded Ben.

"No extra charge, Basswood!" came from the end of the table. "The proprietor has a mustard farm in Connecticut, so the product costs next to nothing."

"I'll farm you if I get hold of you," cried Ben.

So the fun went on until the meal was about finished, when Buster Beggs and Dave slipped out of the dining room.

"Where did you see the turtle?" asked Dave, in a whisper.

"In a storeroom, this way," answered Buster, in an equally low voice. "He was in a big crate."

The two boys hurried to the storeroom men-

tioned, and there, in a box on the floor, was a big turtle, blinking and winking drowsily.

"A snapper!" cried Dave. "He'll create a sensation all right enough."

Between them the two boys took some slats off the top of the box which held the turtle. Then they dragged the box to a side door of the dining room, and making sure they were not seen, dumped the turtle right side up on the floor.

At first the creature did not know what to make of its liberty, but soon it stretched its long neck, gave a shake of its head, and started awkwardly across the dining-room floor toward a center table where a number of ladies and gentlemen were eating. While this was going on Dave and Buster slipped back into their seats.

"Did you hear about that turtle they've got here?" asked Dave, in a tone loud enough for many in the dining room to hear.

"Terribly vicious creature," put in Buster, in a tone equally loud. "They say he nearly bit off the hand of one of the waiters."

"The cook wants to make soup of the turtle, but he doesn't know how to manage the fellow," continued Dave. "He snaps and bites something awful."

"I saw that turtle," said one of the other boys, innocently. "He was in a crate in a side room. He did look pretty ugly."

"I didn't see him," came from another. "Where is he? I'd like to know what a real dangerous turtle looks like."

These words had scarcely been uttered when there came a scream from a lady at the center table.

"Oh, look at that horrid thing coming this way!"

"Hello, it's a turtle!" cried a gentleman.

"The snapping turtle is loose!" yelled Buster Beggs. "Oh, my, what a whopper he is!"

"He'll chew somebody up!"

At that moment the turtle brushed against the foot of one of the young men.

"Oh, dear, he is trying to eat my foot!" shrieked the young man, who was a good deal of a dude. "Oh, really, this is truly awful, don't you know! Help!"

"I—I don't wish to be bitten!" came from an elderly maiden, and she leaped up on a chair, and a dozen others in the dining hall followed suit.

From one part of the floor the snapping turtle turned to another, and as he came for the boys they too took to their chair-seats, while one leaped on the end of the table.

"The turtle is monarch of all he surveys," came from Roger. "Scat!" And he made a kick at the creature. The snapping turtle gave a hiss and a snap that made Roger draw back in alarm.

"Do you know, I really believe he is ugly," said Dave, to Buster, in a low tone.

"Oh, I reckon not," was the answer. But just then the turtle made a fierce snap at another boy, who gave a yell to be heard all over the hotel.

By this time the dining room was in an uproar. Several began to throw things at the snapping turtle, and this made the creature more ugly than ever. From one table he charged to another, until nobody dared to remain on the floor.

"A dollar reward for capturing the turtle!" sang out Phil. "Come now, don't all speak at once."

"You had better win that reward yourself!" came tartly from a man at a near by table.

"Anybody here belonging to a menagerie?" asked Roger. "If so, please speak up and take the turtle away."

The turtle now made another charge, and did this so fiercely that the chair on which Ben was standing went over, casting the lad headlong to the floor. Before he could arise, the snapping turtle had him by the knee of his trousers and was holding on grimly.

"Let go, you beast!" gasped poor Ben. "Let go! Somebody make him let go!" And he continued to struggle.

Fearful that the snapping turtle had his friend by the knee-cap, Dave leaped behind the creature,

and so did Roger, and both caught the turtle by the tail. There was a vicious tug, the ripping of cloth, and then the creature was swung around, with a mouthful of clothing still in its jaws. It made a snap at Dave, but he was too quick and swung himself up on a chair. Roger jumped up on the table, landing with one foot in a dish of fruit and the other on a plate of cheese.

"He ought to be on a tug-of-war team," came from Phil. "Hi, get away from here!" he added, as the turtle stuck out its long neck and gave another hiss.

Phil had just finished when somebody threw a plate, hitting the turtle on the back. The creature whirled around, when a cup hit it in the head. Then it turned again and started for a door leading to the hallway. As it happened a waiter was coming through the doorway with a trayful of eatables, and down went colored man and viands directly on top of the turtle.

"Fo' de sake ob Linkum!" gasped the waiter, trying to scramble up. "Wot's dis? If it ain't dat snapper! How he dun got loose?" And then he lost no time in seeking a place of safety.

"He has gone!" announced Roger, as the turtle disappeared into the hall. A few seconds later came a scream of real pain.

"Somebody has caught it," said Dave, and rushed out of the dining hall, followed by several

others. At the end of the hallway they found a bellboy perched on a hat-rack, nursing a nipped finger.

"He wanted to swaller me!" shrieked the bellboy. "Take him away! Shoot him! He'll kill us all!"

The alarm had brought the proprietor of the hotel to the scene, and for a moment he thought of shooting the snapping turtle.

"I wanted to keep him alive a few days," said he. "We have a big dinner next Tuesday, and I wished to use him then, for a special kind of soup the cook is going to make."

"Let us get the crate," whispered Dave to Buster. "We ought to get him back into it, if we can."

"Excuse me," was the answer. "If he gets hold of you——"

"He is going into the storeroom!" cried a waiter standing near.

"I'll lock him in," said the hotel man.

While he was speaking the turtle turned to a corner of the storeroom. Catching up the crate, Dave flung it over the ugly creature. Then, taking a cane from the hat-rack, he shoved it under the turtle and pinned him fast down in the crate.

"Good for you!" cried the hotel man. "That's the way to fix him."

"It's too bad he got loose," said Dave, innocently. "He has created quite a disturbance."

"I don't want any more trouble with a snapping turtle," said Buster, with a wink at Dave. "They are too lively for me."

And then the supper was brought to a conclusion and the Oak Hall boys started for home. It was not until some days later that a few of the chosen ones learned how it was that the snapping turtle had gained its liberty. They kept the secret, and had many a hearty laugh over it.

CHAPTER XXI

"A POORHOUSE NOBODY"

A FEW days after the football game Nat Poole arrived at Oak Hall. Dave did not see him come, but Ben Basswood did, and he at once informed his chum of the fact.

"He is just as lordly as he ever was," said Ben. "I suppose he expects to cut quite a dash while he is here."

"I want nothing to do with him," answered Dave, quickly. "Do you know to what dormitory he was assigned?"

"No. 13—the one Gus Plum, Macklin, Puffers, and that crowd are in."

"It's just the kind of a crowd he belongs in, Ben. He and Gus Plum would make a good team. They are both rich, and both bullies."

It was not until the next day that Dave met Nat Poole in one of the lower halls. The newcomer stared coldly at Dave for a second, and then passed without either nodding or speaking.

Dave flushed—he could not exactly tell why. He had been on the point of speaking in a general way, but now he shut his mouth tightly. After

that, during the day, he met Nat Poole several times, but not a word was exchanged.

"If he doesn't want to speak to me, I'm sure I don't want to speak to him," said Dave, in talking the matter over with Ben. "Perhaps he thinks himself too good."

"Let him go his own way, Dave. I shouldn't bother my head about him."

"Has he spoken to you?"

"Yes, but not in a very cordial manner. Each of us said, 'How do you do?' and that was all."

It was not long before it became apparent that Nat Poole and Gus Plum were growing very chummy. In the past the bully and Puffers had been close friends, but now Puffers was called away, to join his family, which had moved to the west.

"By the way," said Gus Plum, one day, when he and Poole and Macklin were in their dormitory alone. "As you come from Crumville you must have known Ben Basswood and Dave Porter."

"I knew Basswood pretty well, although he was not my style," answered the aristocratic youth. "Dave Porter I didn't want to know."

"Didn't want to know?" queried Macklin. "Didn't like him, I suppose. I don't like him myself."

"I want to know something of the people I associate with," went on Nat Poole, suggestively.

"Unless a fellow has good family connections he usually doesn't amount to anything."

"Hasn't he good connections? Somebody told me he was a nephew or something like that, of a rich manufacturer named Wadsworth."

"A nephew!" cried Nat Pools. "He is no relation whatever to Oliver Wadsworth. Wadsworth merely took a fancy to him—I can't see why—and sent him to school here."

"Then, where did Porter come from?" asked Gus Plum, interested.

"Came from the Crumville poorhouse," answered Nat Poole. "He's a foundling—a mere nobody. That's the reason I don't want anything to do with him."

"Well, I never!" ejaculated the bully of the school. He mused for a moment and then gave a low whistle. "Wish I had known of this before," he went on. "Did you tell anybody else?"

"No—I haven't been asked. I thought you'd like to know it."

"You're right there. I like to pick the people I associate with, the same as you do. I don't want to know any poorhouse nobodies."

"It's a wonder Dr. Clay let him come here," ventured Macklin. "All the other boys, so far as I know, come from the best of families. Some of them wouldn't like it a bit to learn they were schooling with a poorhouse nobody."

"Hasn't he any relatives at all?"

"Not any, so far as is known. He was a pick-up—probably belonged to some low people who didn't want to pay for raising him."

"I see." Gus Plum's eyes began to glow. "Say, but I'm mighty glad you told me of this."

"Porter used to live with an old broken-down crank named Caspar Potts," went on Nat Poole. "Potts owed my father money, and there was quite a row before my old man could get what was coming to him. Dave Porter took Potts's part, and he and I had some sharp words. That is why he keeps his distance now. I let him understand that he wasn't in my class at all."

"Good for you!" cried the bully of Oak Hall. "After this I'll let him know what I think of him, too."

"Maybe we had better let the other fellows know about this," suggested Macklin. "I'm sure such fellows from fine families as Phil Lawrence and Lazy Day won't want to associate with a poor-house upstart."

"Don't tell Porter I told you of this," put in Nat Poole, hastily. "I—well,—you understand——"

"Oh, that's all right," answered Gus Plum. "We shan't get you into any trouble."

The matter was talked over for half an hour, and when some of the other students came in the

bully and the sneak mentioned what they had learned, in an off-hand way. As Dave was being talked of because of the run during the football game, the revelation created something of a sensation, and the news quickly spread until every boy at Oak Hall had heard it.

"By jinks, I can't believe this!" cried Sam Day, running up to Shadow, who was in the Hall gymnasium.

"Can't believe what, Lazy?" demanded the boy who loved to tell stories.

"What the fellows are telling about Dave Porter."

"What are they telling?"

"They say he is a nobody—that he was raised in a poorhouse, and that he doesn't know anything about his parents or relatives."

At this announcement Shadow Hamilton, who was on a bar, dropped to the floor.

"Is that true?"

"So they say."

"Who told you?"

"Blinky Watterson."

"And who told Blinky?"

"Chip Macklin. But Blinky heard it elsewhere, too. He said it must be so."

"I can't believe it," answered Shadow, soberly. "If it is true——" He stopped short.

"What?" demanded Sam Day.

"I—I shouldn't like to say, Lazy. Dave is a pretty nice chap, isn't he?"

"Yes, but——"

"Let's go and ask Phil Lawrence about this," and off the two students hurried to consult their leader.

During that day Dave noticed that a number of the students looked at him rather curiously. A few who in the past had spoken to him cordially now appeared not to see him when they went by. Once he passed Gus Plum, and the bully grinned in a sickly way but said nothing.

The blow fell on the following afternoon, shortly after the studies for the day were over. Dave, having nothing else to do, walked into the gymnasium, where he found Gus Plum and a dozen other pupils congregated. Dave began to swing upon some rings, when the bully promptly left off exercising.

"Come on, fellows," cried Plum, in a low but distinct voice, so that Dave might catch what he said. "I don't care to exercise with a nobody!" And he moved towards the door.

Several started to follow, including Macklin, who added, in a loud voice: "That's so—I like to pick my company."

"For shame, Plum!" came from Phil, who had just stepped into the gymnasium, after Dave.

"All right, Lawrence, you can associate with

whom you please. I like to pick my company," answered the bully.

"And we don't pick poorhouse nobodies," added another boy, keeping close to the bully.

At the latter words Dave turned white, and allowed himself to drop to the floor. Like a flash he understood what had been going on and why some of his fellow-students had been treating him so strangely.

"What—what do you mean?" he faltered, facing the bully of Oak Hall.

"I mean just what I say, Dave Porter. I don't want anything to do with you," answered Gus Plum, loudly. "I can't understand why Dr. Clay allowed you to become a pupil here."

"Plum, you're a—a brute," interposed Phil, drawing himself up. "This sort of thing isn't fair at all," he went on, earnestly. "Dave is a good fellow, and you know it."

"Pooh! Stick up for him if you wish, but as for me, I don't intend to associate with a poorhouse fellow; yes, and a mere nobody at that."

Plum had scarcely uttered the words when he found himself in Dave's grip. The face of the country youth was like a sheet and his grasp was like that of steel.

"Gus Plum, you take that back!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Take it back, or I'll—I'll——"

Dave's look was so truly awful that the bully of Oak Hall actually shivered. He wanted to say something biting and sarcastic, but the words died on his lips.

"You—you—let go of me!" he faltered. "Let go!"

"I'm half of a mind to—to—strangle you!" returned Dave, and his grip did not lessen in the least. "You're a—a—I don't know what to call you."

"Let go!" and now Gus Plum began to struggle.

"Don't fight here," cried Phil, touching Dave on the shoulder. "If you do, you'll get yourself into trouble."

"But, Phil——" The words came almost pleadingly. Dave looked at his chum keenly, as if to read his innermost thoughts.

"I know—and I agree with you—Gus Plum is a brute, and Macklin is a snipe not worth considering. But don't have it out here."

"All right, I'll take your advice," said Dave, and he gave the bully of Oak Hall a shove that landed him flat on his back. It took Plum but a moment to scramble to his feet.

"I'll show you!" he roared, squaring off. "I'll show you!"

"A fight! A fight!" was the shout.

"Now you'll see Gus polish off the poorhouse

nobody," said one boy, but in such a low tone that only a few friends heard the remark.

"Dave, don't fight in here—arrange for a meeting later," urged Phil again. "This is no place for it. Somebody may come in, and——"

Phil had no time to say more, for Gus Plum was dancing around wildly. Now he let out with his right fist, and struck Dave on the shoulder.

It was the last straw, and casting prudence to the winds Dave assailed his foe with vigor. He struck the bully on the arm and in the chest, and then the two clinched and wrestled over a large portion of the gymnasium floor. Then they broke away again, and Dave was hit in the ear, and landed a telling blow on the bully's right eye.

"Cheese it! cheese it!" came the cry from a boy standing near the open door. "Here comes old Haskers!"

The cry was taken up by others. The second assistant teacher heard it, and at once, surmising that something was wrong, started toward the gymnasium on a run.

"I'll meet you some other time," growled Gus Plum, just as the teacher put in an appearance.

"All right—whenever you are ready I'll be," answered Dave, and then he and Phil hurried in one direction, while the bully and Macklin hurried in another.

CHAPTER XXII

DAVE INTERVIEWS DR. CLAY

"You gave him as good as he sent," remarked Phil, as he and Dave walked down towards the river. "That last blow was a real eye-closer."

He looked at Dave keenly, but the other youth turned his face away. To tell the truth, Dave was not thinking of the fight—the words of Plum and Macklin, and some others, were ringing in his ears: "A poorhouse nobody! A poorhouse nobody!"

"Don't you mind what they said, Dave," resumed Phil, after a pause. "It was mean, very mean, indeed!"

"I know it, Phil, but—but——"

"You are not to blame for having been taken to such an institution when you were little."

"Yes, that's true, but some of the fellows won't look at it that way. They'll do as Plum has done, —and give me the cold shoulder."

"Not our crowd. If any fellow of our crowd does it, I'll give him a piece of my mind—and the cold shoulder in the bargain," answered Phil Lawrence. He spoke in a low tone but with decision.

They had just reached the river side when Roger joined them, followed by Ben.

"Just heard you had a fight with Plum," cried the senator's son. "You don't look much punished."

"It was cut short by Mr. Haskers," answered Dave.

"How did it start?" questioned Ben.

"It was something the bully said to Dave," replied Phil, and he looked at the others in a peculiar way. "It was dirt-mean; that is all I have to say about it."

"Ben, I know you will stick to me," cried Dave, catching his old friend by the hand. "You know all about the—the past."

"Oh, so that was it," said Ben. "I hope you punched the whole head off the bully."

"What did Plum say?" demanded Roger, flatly. "Come, let me into the secret."

"He called me a poorhouse nobody!" burst out Dave, with great bitterness. "I—I'm not going to allow anybody to call me that, so there!" And he clenched his fists.

"Oh, I see!" Roger gave a low whistle. "How did he learn that you were brought up at the poorhouse?"

"Through Nat Poole, I suppose. That crowd will ding it into everybody now, and they'll do what they can to set the school against me!" Dave's

lip began to quiver, and he had to turn away to control his feelings.

"Don't you mind them!" said the senator's son, quickly. "I'll stick to you, for one, Dave."

"And you can count on me," added Phil.

"Dave knows how I stand," put in Ben. "I think he is worth a dozen such contemptible chaps as Nat Poole and Gus Plum, and as for that little sneak, Macklin, he isn't even worth considering."

"You are all very kind." In spite of his efforts to control himself, the tears stood in the eyes of the country boy. "I shan't forget your goodness."

The four went out on the river, and did not return to the academy until half an hour later, when Dave felt somewhat like himself again. On reaching Oak Hall they separated, and Dave hurried to Dormitory No. 12. He found a boy named Will Fellen there.

"Hello, Will," he said, pleasantly.

"Hello yourself," came shortly from Fellen. He looked at the country boy coldly and then, without another word, left the dormitory, slamming the door behind him.

Dave's face began to burn and he paced the floor with clinched fists. If this was to be the treatment received how could he face all of the students, in the dining hall and in the classroom?

"I'd better go back to Crumville," he told himself. "But I shan't do it—it wouldn't be fair to

Mr. Wadsworth. I'll stay and fight it out—if Dr. Clay will let me."

He left the dormitory and without hesitation hurried below and to Dr. Clay's private office. His knock was answered by a brief, "Come in," and he entered, to find the master of Oak Hall poring over some academy bills.

"What is it, Master Porter?" questioned Dr. Clay, pleasantly.

"Can I have a few words in private with you, Dr. Clay?"

"Certainly. What do you want?"

"I—I want to—to speak about myself." Dave tried to talk steadily, but his voice trembled in spite of himself.

"Yes?"

"When Mr. Wadsworth had me placed here, did he—he tell you anything about me—of the past—where I came from?"

"Oh, that is what you want to know." The doctor leaned back in his easy chair. "Why, yes, he told me that you had been living with an old broken-down college professor who was trying to run a farm, and that the professor had had you bound out to him by a—er—a public institution."

"It was the Crumville poorhouse. Did he tell you that?"

"Yes. But Mr. Wadsworth said you were not a—er—a common boy, but very bright, and very

manly, and he had taken an interest in you on that account as well as because you had saved his daughter from being burned."

"And you didn't mind my coming here because —because I wasn't from a—some well-known family?"

"No, I had no objection to that, so long as you behaved as well as the rest of my pupils."

"It was kind of you, Dr. Clay!" And Dave began to warm up. "Very kind indeed!"

"Not at all, Porter. You have as much right to an education as anybody. You—but what brought you here? Has anybody said anything of this to you?" And now the master of Oak Hall bent a pair of shrewd, penetrating eyes upon the youth.

"Yes, sir, and I was afraid——"

"Who was it?"

"I don't care to mention any names, sir. But I thought that perhaps you didn't know—and that if it became known, and you didn't want me—that it was going to hurt the school——"

"You need not proceed, Porter. I think I understand you. I thought this matter over before I sent word to Mr. Wadsworth that you might come. I don't mind telling you now that I told him in my first letter that I would try you for a few weeks or a month. Yesterday I sent him another letter, in which I told him that you were doing

well and that I would be satisfied to keep you as long as he wished you to remain."

"Oh!"

"I imagined that some boys might be mean enough to—er—to throw this up to you, and I am sorry that it has occurred. If you will give me their names, I will see that they are properly punished."

"Oh, sir, I don't want to do that. But I—I was afraid they might leave the school on my account."

Dr. Clay stiffened up. "If anybody wishes to leave he can go," he said. "I am not going to put you out. I want you to stay, both on your own account and for the sake of Oliver Wadsworth, who is an old and dear friend, and on account of old Professor Potts, of whom I have heard. All I ask of you is, that you behave as well as the average pupil here, and attend to your studies."

Before the master of the Hall ceased speaking Dave's face was beaming, and at the conclusion he caught the doctor's hand in a tight squeeze.

"You are very kind, Dr. Clay."

"It is no kindness, Porter, only justice. I do not imagine that the majority of your fellow students will think any the less of you because of your past. I should be sorry to find them so narrow-minded. And as for the others, take my advice, and pay no attention to them—unless, of course, they

grow too obnoxious, in which case you had better report to me."

"Then you really and truly want me to stay?"

"Yes, if you like the school."

"I do, very much,—and I'll promise to study harder than ever, now that I know how matters stand," added Dave.

"You made quite a record at the football game with Rockville, I believe. I should imagine some of the boys would like you for that," and the master of Oak Hall smiled.

"They do, but some others are down on me—those who didn't get on the team."

"Well, you must expect that. It is the way of the world. The higher you get in life the more jealous people will pick you out, and do what they can to pull you down. The really successful man, or boy, rises above such meanness."

"I understand, and I shall try to act on your advice."

"Then that is settled, and you had better be going to supper. The bell rang several minutes ago. Say I excused you."

"Thank you, I will," answered Dave, and bowed himself out of the office. With a heart as light as air, he hurried down the long corridor and into the dining hall. All his dark troubles seemed to be things of the past.

When he entered the dining hall several gazed

at him curiously, and Gus Plum, whose eye was partly blackened, looked sour. Two or three lads "stuck up their noses" at Dave, but he paid no attention to anybody and merely slipped quietly into his seat.

"Master Porter, you are late," came severely from Job Haskers. "What is the reason?"

"I had an interview with Dr. Clay, in his office," answered Dave. "He told me to state that I was excused for my tardiness."

"Oh!" grumbled the second assistant, and then said no more.

Ben, Phil, and Roger looked at the country boy questioningly, but during the meal Dave got no opportunity to explain matters. And this was just as well, for he scarcely knew what to say to his friends. The meal over the lads hurried outdoors again.

"Did you report Plum?" demanded Phil, quickly.

"No, I reported nobody," answered Dave. "I am going to fight my own battles."

"But you went to the doctor——" began Roger.

"I asked him about myself, that's all. I wanted him to know that I—well, that I didn't intend to sail under false colors, as they call it."

"And what did he say, Dave?" asked Ben. "You needn't answer if you don't want to," he added hastily.

"He was very kind—oh, he's just the best man in the world! He said he knew everything, and that I needn't mind what some of the fellows might say—that he wanted me to stay——"

"Hurrah for Dr. Clay!" interrupted Phil. I knew it. He's a man, every inch of him."

"I don't know how many of the fellows will give me the cold shoulder," continued the country boy. "But I am going to do my best not to mind them."

"And we'll help you," said the senator's son, and the others said the same.

Ben remained with Dave, but Roger and Phil soon went off. The latter did not tell why, but it was for the purpose of interviewing some of the other boys. They spoke to a dozen or more, including Sam Day, Shadow Hamilton, and Buster Beggs. On the whole, the interviews were satisfactory, although a few of the boys wanted to know more about Dave before deciding for or against him.

CHAPTER XXIII

JOINING A SECRET SOCIETY

Like all boarding schools and colleges, Oak Hall was not without its clubs. There was a Debating Club, a Glee Club, a Boat Club, and also those devoted to field sports.

In addition to these there was a secret society known by the mysterious name of Gee Eyes,—the application of the name being known only to the charter members and the officers. Not to keep my readers in suspense unnecessarily let me say that the name Gee Eyes stood for the initials G and I, which in their turn stood for the words, Guess It. The society had its own grip and passwords as well as signs, both serious and funny.

Fully thirty of the best students of Oak Hall belonged to the Gee Eyes, and Phil Lawrence was the president, officially designated as the Right Honorable Muck-a-Muck. Buster Beggs was the secretary, and was called the Lord of the Penwiper, and Shadow Hamilton enjoyed the position of sergeant-at-arms, under the title of Captain Doorkeep.

Dave, Roger, and Ben had not yet been initi-

ated into the society, but their names were up for membership, as well as the names of Nat Poole and several others.

On the evening following the trouble just recorded, the Gee Eyes held a meeting in an old boathouse located down the river, a quarter of a mile from Oak Hall. Nearly thirty members were present, and the names of those up for initiation were thoroughly discussed.

"I shan't vote for Dave Porter," said Will Fellen, flatly. "I want to keep the standard of this society up to the top notch."

"Just what I say," said another student, who was a follower of Gus Plum.

"You are making a big mistake, Fellen," said Phil Lawrence, quietly but firmly. "Dave Porter is a fine fellow, and he must come into this society if I am to remain a member. I am not going to stand and see him black-listed in this fashion."

"How do you know he will come in?" asked another.

"I've sounded him, and he will come in if we want him. He ought to become a member, and so ought Roger Morr and Ben Basswood."

"What of Nat Poole and Harry Haven?"

"Haven seems a nice sort. As for Nat Poole, I'd rather wait and know more of him. He seems to train a good deal with Gus Plum."

"I'll vote for Porter, but I want Poole to come in too," said a lad named Gassberry.

A discussion lasting half an hour ensued, and it was plainly to be seen that a number of the boys had been listening to what Gus Plum and his friends had had to say against Dave. Yet the opposition melted greatly before Phil's vigorous denunciation of the bully, and in the end it was voted to make Dave a member, and to take in all of the others mentioned likewise.

As soon as the meeting broke up Phil lost no time in singling out Dave, Ben, and Roger.

"We want all of you to join our secret society," he said. "You've heard of it, the Gee Eyes. We have voted to make you members."

"Do the boys want me for a member?" asked Dave, quickly.

"They do."

"All of them?"

"The vote was almost unanimous. Only two stood out against twenty-six, and they won't count."

This reply made Dave feel glad—it was certain that he had not lost many friends by the actions of Gus Plum and his followers.

"All right, Phil, I'll join, and tell the boys I am thankful to them for voting for me," said he, and the others said practically the same.

"My opinion of it is, that Gus Plum has hurt himself by talking against you, Dave," went on

Phil, later on, when they were alone. "At first the lads—or some of them—thought they ought to turn against you, but when they were reasoned with, and thought it over, they concluded that it would be a mean thing to give you the cold shoulder, after the manly way you were acting, and especially after what you did for Oak Hall at the football match."

"I'm sure I've got you to thank for it all, Phil," answered Dave. "I'll not forget it, old fellow!" And he caught Phil by the shoulder affectionately.

Dave had expected to hear from the bully concerning the proposed fight, but nothing came in the way of a challenge. To tell the truth, Gus Plum was just a little afraid of Dave, and likewise afraid of his popularity.

"I can't understand why the fellows stick up for his kind," he declared to Nat Poole, "but they do, and nothing seems to change 'em."

"I understand they are going to make him a member of the Gee Eyes. They are going to make me a member too. Do you belong?"

"Yes, but I haven't attended a meeting since they put in Phil Lawrence as leader. I won't play second fiddle to that chap."

"I'm going to join just to see what it's like," added Nat Poole. "I can drop it like yourself if I don't like it."

Two days later Dave was informed that the initi-

ation ceremonies would be held at the old boat-house that evening. He promised to be on hand, and promptly at the hour appointed presented himself, in company with Ben and Roger. Nat Poole and Haven were also present.

The candidates found the members of the Gee Eyes duly assembled. Each wore a cotton robe of red and had a big black hood over his head, with a yellow tassel dangling over one ear. Two were armed with wooden swords, one had a wooden hammer, and some others had stuffed clubs.

As soon as they had been greeted, the candidates were pounced upon from behind, and each was made a prisoner and blindfolded. Then they were placed in a bunch, and the members of the Gee Eyes joined hands and began to dance around them, singing as they did so:

"Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly danky!
One is fat and one is lanky!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dall,
One is tall and one is small!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dive!
Let us cut 'em up alive!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly derry!
Cast them in the cemetery!"

This was followed by a ferocious hissing sound, and then the chant went on:

"Willy nilly! chi phi!
Let us blow 'em sky high!
Cap 'em, rap em, slap 'em hard,
Boil 'em down to bones and lard!

Dress 'em, press 'em, mess 'em down,
Fit to wear a college gown!"

Following this there came a mock parade, one of the members with a sword leading, and then he of the wooden hammer advanced slowly.

"Kneel, ye craven hearts!" he called in a bass voice, that sounded strangely like that of Shadow Hamilton. "Kneel, before this trusty hammer knocks ye to the soil!"

All knelt but Nat Poole.

"See here, what are you going to do?" he asked, anxiously.

"Get down!" whispered the boy named Haven. "They won't hurt you much."

Nat Poole went down on his knees very gingerly, and it must be confessed that he was trembling.

Now, as it happened, some very small tacks had been placed on the boathouse floor. Dave and Roger escaped them, but the others did not, and a yell of pain went up.

"Oh, dear, who put these tacks here!" cried Nat Poole. "Oh, I've got three in my knees." And he danced around in anguish.

At once a big wooden imitation of a claw hammer was produced.

"Take the tacks out with this," was the command.

"I—I can't use that," groaned Nat Poole.

"You must. It is against Section 28, Rule 249,

of this society to pull out tacks with your fingers," and then a laugh went up, in which Dave, Roger, and Ben joined.

"Seize number one!" was the cry, from a corner, and in a twinkling Dave found himself caught by three of the members of the club. Then the other candidates were hustled away, to some place unknown.

Feeling that he might be handled roughly if he resisted, the country lad submitted quietly.

"Art thou prepared to meet thy doom?" was the question asked of him, amid a death-like silence.

"Why, yes, please introduce me," he answered brightly, and this retort brought forth a snicker.

"Thou shalt have thy choice, base slave, to be cut up or burned up. Which? Speak up!"

"If it's all the same, I'd like to be burned up," he answered as cheerfully as ever. "Do you know why?"

"Why?" came from behind him.

"It will save funeral expenses." And then there was another snicker.

"Away to the funeral pyre with him," was the next command, and a moment later, still blindfolded, Dave was led from the old boathouse and into the woods skirting the river. Here he was made to walk around in several circles, until he imagined that they were taking him quite a dis-

tance. Then they brought him back to a horse-shed standing just behind the boathouse.

"Here is the house," said somebody, in a low tone.

"Will we dare to burn it down?" came from another.

"Sure, nobody owns it," came from somebody else. "Tie him fast, and be quick about it."

"Be careful, we don't want to burn him too much," came in an intense whisper, but meant to reach Dave.

"Oh, a few good scars won't hurt him," was the answer. "It will give him something to remember his schooldays by."

Dave heard every word, but he made no protest. He was bound to stick it out to the end, no matter what happened.

"I'm sure they won't really hurt me," he told himself. "Anyway, I'm not going to yell until I'm hurt."

Pretty soon Dave smelt smoke, and then he was tied fast to a post, so that he could not move hand or foot.

"Now, a lasting farewell!" was the cry.

Then the members of the Gee Eyes left the vicinity, talking earnestly among themselves.

The smoke kept growing thicker, until Dave had to cough. Then he felt his hands and feet getting hot.

"This isn't so comfortable," he reasoned. "Wonder how long it will last?"

"Look! look!" was the sudden cry, from outside the shed. "See how that fire is spreading!"

"Say, boys, we'll have to get him out! This is going too far!"

"Get him out? You can't do it now! It's too late!"

"Yes! yes!" came from a dozen students, in voices of anguish. "It's too late! Dave Porter will be burned up!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW THE INITIATIONS TURNED OUT

It must be admitted that Dave was startled, for he had no desire to be burned alive, or to suffer in the least from the conflagration so close at hand.

"Can the fire have gotten the better of them?" he asked himself. "Or is this only another test of my nerves?"

The students continued to shout, and a moment later Dave felt a burning brand come down and strike his hand. He was on the point of beginning to struggle, but gritted his teeth and checked himself.

"It's only their fun—Phil wouldn't leave me to burn up," he reasoned, and then began to whistle merrily to himself. At this the members of the society came to a dead halt.

"He whistles," said one. "Great Cæsar! and the house is burning down on his head!"

"Call out the fire department," cried Dave. "Play away, No. 2—bring us a six-story ladder, so we can get into the cellar. This is as good as the toothache when there's a honey tart around! Will

somebody be kind enough to lend me an overcoat? I'm getting cold for the lack of exercise."

This sally brought forth an unexpected burst of laughter, and then Dave laughed too. The next instant the bandage was torn from his eyes and he found himself at a corner of the shed, with little bonfires in front and behind him. Several boys had firebrands, which they had been waving near him.

"You're true blue, Dave!" came from Phil, as he stepped forward, and unmasked. "Am I right, fellows?"

"Yes, he's O. K!" was the answer.

"And I welcome you as a member of our society," went on the Right Honorable Muck-a-Muck. "I thought sure, Dave, you'd yell like an Indian when we said the house was on fire."

"Come on and initiate Morr and Basswood," commanded Shadow Hamiltoon. "Here, mask yourself, Dave," and he was given a black hood with a yellow tassel.

Roger was taken next and put through a "water test," as it was termed. Back of the boathouse was a pool, and over this he was suspended head downward and lowered until his eyes were on a level with the water. Then the boys pretended to go away. The rope began to slip, and it looked as if Roger might be drowned. But he held his

peace, and so came out of the ordeal "a good fellow."

Ben was given "the sawmill test." One of the lads had a toy which imitated a buzz saw, and after being led through the woods, Ben was tied to a plank placed over an old nail keg.

"Now, boys, be careful," was the command. "Don't let him run too close to the buzz saw, or you'll cut him in half. Just shave off a few of his curly locks, that's all."

And then poor Ben was rolled forward, and the imitation buzz saw was started up. Sawdust had been brought along, and this was showered in the victim's face, and one boy pulled two or three of his hairs. Then of a sudden came a yell!

"Look out! Don't let that board run so fast!"

"I can't hold it!"

"He'll be cut in two!"

"Stop the saw! Stop the saw, quick!" but the buzzing went on all the faster. Yet Ben was grit, and took it calmly, not uttering a single word of protest. Then he, too, was hailed as a fellow member.

"No fun in this," grumbled one of the party.

"What were you going to do to Haven and Poole?" asked Dave.

"Water and fire test," was the reply.

"I've got a plan for Poole, if you'll try it," went on Dave, and told what it was.

"Just the thing! Take the washboiler for the explosion," answered Phil.

Haven came next; and although he squirmed somewhat at being lowered into the water, yet he passed the ordeal fairly well. Then the crowd came to Nat Poole.

"You've kept me waiting long enough," complained the aristocratic youth.

"Grumble not, thy doom is doubly sealed," came the solemn answer. "Away with him to the old powder mill."

"The powder mill?" queried Poole anxiously. "I don't want to go to any powder mill."

No answer was vouchsafed to this, and blindfolded he was hurried around the woods and then back to the shed.

"Hello, here are some kegs of powder, all heaped up," cried Dave, in an assumed voice.

"A pretty big pile of them," said Roger, also in an assumed voice.

"Be careful of that fire," shouted Phil, in a high-pitched, nervous tone. "If you aren't careful you'll blow us all to kingdom-come!"

"See here, I don't want to stay!" cried Nat Poole, in greater alarm than before.

He began to struggle, but was quickly made fast to a post. Then the bonfires were started up once more and the smoke was fanned toward him.

"Let up, I say!" he bellowed. "I don't like this! This fire——"

"The powder! The powder!" shrieked Dave. "It's rolling this way!"

"There goes a keg of it into the fire!" called another.

"Run for your lives, boys! The powder is going to blow up!"

"Save me! save me!" shrieked Nat Poole, shaking like a reed in the wind. "Oh, save me! I—I don't want to be blown up! Save me! I'll give you a—a thousand dollars! Oh, I don't want to die just yet!" And he began to tear at his bonds, in the midst of which the members of the club set up a loud shout of laughter. Then Nat Poole was released and the bandage taken from his eyes.

"Whe—where is the—the powder?" he gasped, staring around wildly.

"In your eye," was the answer, from Shadow. "I guess somebody's sold," he added, and then another shout of laughter went up.

"Why didn't you keep quiet?" said Haven, in disgust. "Nobody was going to hurt you."

"But—but—isn't there any powder?"

"Not a grain."

"Boys, I am afraid he hasn't nerve enough to become a member of the Gee Eyes," pronounced the Right Honorable Muck-a-Muck, seriously.

"His backbone shows remarkable signs of disintegrating," came from another—Polly Vane.

"His knees are too toggle-jointed," added Sam Day.

Nat Poole gazed around, and saw that all present had been making fun of him.

"I don't want anything to do with your old society!" he growled, backing away. "I—I wouldn't join it for a hundred dollars."

"What! do you give up the desire to become a member?" demanded one of the students who had helped to found the Gee Eyes. "If you do that, you can never join later."

"I don't care—I don't want to join," answered Nat Poole, hotly, and then turning, he ran away as fast as his legs could carry him.

"What a pill!" was Buster Beggs's comment, and a great many of the others agreed with him.

The initiation at an end, Dave and the others who had passed were instructed in the grips, signs, and passwords, and then told of the rules and regulations. The initiation fee was two dollars, used principally in the purchase of a red robe and a cap. During the week following each new member had some ridiculous thing to do. Dave had to learn the alphabet backwards, Roger had to ask three shopkeepers of Oakdale if they had any lobster oil to sell, and Ben had to stand in the middle of the road outside of the Hall and ask the first person

who came along if he would kindly save him from drowning.

Ben's task came close to getting him into trouble. He went out in the road when he supposed the coast was clear, to stay there exactly ten minutes. Eight minutes had passed, when to his dismay an old farmer came along, driving several cows.

"Excuse me," called out Ben, as cheerfully as he could. "But will you kindly save me from drowning?"

"Save you from what?" asked the farmer.

"Will you kindly save me from drowning?" repeated Ben. He had to make the request three times.

"I guess you are out o' your head," sniffed the farmer. "Drownin', when there ain't no water in sight!"

"Will you kindly save me from drowning?" repeated Ben.

"See here, you can't poke no fun at me!" stormed the farmer, and made at Ben with his cow-whip. But Ben was too quick for him, and ran out of sight with all speed.

"I fancy my task was the easiest after all," said Dave, "although learning the alphabet backwards isn't the easiest thing in the world." When Dave recited before a committee of five, he had to stand on his head and fan himself in the meanwhile. Yet with it all he enjoyed the fun as much as anybody.

CHAPTER XXV

A WILD MOONLIGHT TROLLEY RIDE

AFTER his failure to stand the initiation tests of the Gee Eyes Club, Nat Poole became more bitter than ever against Dave. In some manner he attributed his failure to Dave, and also to Ben and Roger, and nothing that Haven, the other candidate, could say, could alter his opinion.

"They doctored that up between them, and I know it," said Poole to Gus Plum. "They made it just as terrible as they possibly could."

"Oh, that crowd is down on us, Nat, you can easily see that," returned the bully of Oak Hall. "I know they hate me worse than poison, and they'll hate you just because we are chummy."

"They can go to grass," growled Poole.

"Those fellows think they are going to run Oak Hall," put in Macklin, who was lounging in an easy-chair close by. "They are going to run everything to suit themselves."

"I'd like to get that whole club into disgrace," went on Poole, meditatively. "It would be just paying them back for the way they treated me."

"Never mind, we'll square up some day," an-

swered Plum. "Just wait till everything is ripe. I'll show you a trick or two;" and there the discussion ended.

When Dave told Dr. Clay he was going to do his best while at Oak Hall he meant what he said. Despite his initiation into the club, and his attention to certain sports, he worked diligently over his studies, and soon stood second in a class of thirty-six. He was especially strong in mathematics and in history, and this pleased Mr. Wadsworth and Caspar Potts very much.

"I am glad I sent him to that school," said the rich manufacturer. "If he keeps on as he has begun he will assuredly make his mark."

"I knew it—I knew it," answered the old professor. "Dave has it in him; he is no common boy. I saw that the day I had him bound out to me."

"It is queer that nothing has ever been learned concerning his parentage, professor."

"You are right there."

"I have asked the old authorities of the poor-house, but they say they know absolutely nothing."

"Yes, I asked them myself, for I wanted Dave to know all there was to know—if it was going to do him any good."

In his letter to Caspar Potts the boy could not help but touch upon the incident which had caused him so much pain, but he made it plain that he intended to "live it down" and was getting along

very well in the task. This caused the professor to write a long letter in return, in which he urged Dave not to pay attention to those who had sneered at him.

As a test in history the class to which Dave belonged had to write a composition on the "Three Greatest Achievements of George Washington." The pupils were given ten days in which to bring in the papers, and Dave worked hard to make his the best of the number. It was hard for him to decide upon which had been the three greatest achievements, and he wrote three compositions before he finished one that suited him.

On the day before the compositions were to be handed in, Dave chanced to go up to his dormitory during the morning recess. He was just in time to catch Chip Macklin leaving the room. Macklin looked scared, and lost no time in disappearing without saying a word.

"He acts queer," thought Dave. "I wonder if he is up to some of his underhanded work?"

The morning passed, and at noon Dave went for his composition, which he had left in his drawer of a desk the dormitory contained. To his consternation the paper was missing.

"I couldn't have put it in somebody else's drawer," he mused, and looked the others over. He was doing this when Phil entered.

"What's up, Dave? You look worried."

"My composition is missing."

"Missing?"

"Yes, I placed it in my drawer last night and now it's gone. I thought it might be in one of the other drawers. You haven't seen it, have you?"

"No."

The desk was searched from top to bottom, but all Dave could find were the two discarded compositions.

"This is queer," said Phil. "Nobody would steal a composition."

"As I came into the dormitory, I saw Chip Macklin at the door. He was coming out."

"He hasn't any right in this room."

The matter was talked over, but nothing came of it. It was now time to return to the classroom, and Dave did not know what to do.

"Why don't you hand in one of the other compositions?" suggested Phil. "That will be better than nothing."

"I'll do it, Phil—but I wish I had that last."

The composition was given to Job Haskers, and when the matter was made public Dave received ninety per cent. out of a possible hundred. Only four boys were ahead of him, the highest per cent. being ninety-seven.

"That was pretty good," said Phil. "Considering it was your second best, so to speak."

"I'd give a dollar to know what became of that

other composition," was the reply. But for the time being the matter remained a mystery.

On the following week Dave received an invitation which filled him with curiosity. It was from the Gee Eyes, and requested his presence at a moonlight trolley ride, to take place " On the fateful evening of Friday, November thirteen, party to leave the school at exactly thirteen minutes after nine o'clock. Expense of said trip to each member, twice thirteen cents."

" Something is up," he thought. " Wonder if I had better go? "

He found out that Ben and Roger had received invitations, but that they were also in the dark. Phil knew all about the trip, but as an officer of the club he could give them no explanations.

" But you are going? " queried Dave.

" To be sure."

" Will it be safe? "

" We hope to make it so."

" Then I'll go," answered Dave, and Roger and Ben said the same.

As luck would have it, Friday night proved to be perfect, and the crowd got away from Oak Hall with but little trouble. There were twenty-one students, including Murphy, the monitor, who took an extra risk in order to get away. But Murphy was one of the charter members of the Gee Eyes, which accounted for his valor in that particular.

As soon as the grounds of the academy were left behind, the members of the club were formed into a regular company and made to march like so many soldiers towards Rockville. No explanations were offered to those not in the secret, but the treasurer, called the Lord of the Money Sack, made each individual hand over his twenty-six cents.

Half the distance to Rockville was covered when the party turned down a hill to a lonely country road, upon which ran the trolley line which connected Rockville, Bendham, Pitt's Corners, and several other places. This trolley had been built about two years. It did not pay very well, and no cars were run upon it from midnight until six in the morning.

Coming to a certain point on the line, the crowd was halted, and the leader looked at his watch.

"Where's the ride?" queried Roger, for no trolley car was in sight.

He had scarcely spoken when a car came slowly into sight, decorated with flags and strips of bunting. Nobody but an old motorman was in sight.

"Here she is! All aboard, fellows!" was the cry, and without ceremony the club members climbed into the car. Then two of them, who wore masks, called to the motorman.

"What's wanted?" asked the old man.

"Hot box, I guess," said one of the masked boys. "Just look here."

The motorman left the car, and walked toward the wheel which had been pointed out. As he did this he was seized from behind and made a prisoner. They marched him to a tree, and produced a cord as if to bind him fast.

"Now will you wait here until we come back, or shall we have to tie you to this tree?" said one of the masked boys. "We won't hurt you or the car, and we'll be back inside of two hours. It's three dollars in your pocket if you don't open your mouth."

"You'll wreck the car and kill yerselves," grumbled the old motorman.

"No, we won't. Now, will you keep still and be good, or must we tie you up?"

"I'll wait here and say nothing if you pay me and there's no trouble. But if there is damage done, it's you will foot the bill," was the warning.

One of the boys was already at the front of the car. He kicked off the brake, turned on the power, and away went the car with a jerk that threw all those standing off their feet. There was a yell and a cheer, followed by wild hurrahs, as the turnout swept along the somewhat uneven track, up grade and down, and around numerous curves, and over bridges.

"Say, ain't this dandy!"

"Let her go, Mr. Motorman! We want our money's worth."

"Don't chute the chutes when we come to the river!"

"I wonder if this is safe?" asked Dave of Roger. "It seems to me we are running pretty fast."

"Running fast? I should say we were." Roger raised his voice. "I say, you of the handle in front, don't let her get away from you!"

"This is the Overland Express!" was shouted back. "Through train, with no sleepers and no stops!" And another cheer went up, which startled the inhabitants of a village through which they were rushing. Several ran out, and concluded the car was in the possession of a number of lunatics.

"You want to come up here!" came from Buster Beggs, who was perched on the roof of the car. "The moonlight effect is grand."

"You hold on when we round a curve," said Dave, warningly. "If you don't you'll find yourself pitched into the middle of next week."

"Which puts me in mind of a story I heard a railroad man tell," came from Shadow. "He was talking of the curves on a line in Colorado. He said the engineer of the train used to leave his dinner pail in the caboose of the freight and when he wanted it he'd wait till he got to one of those close curves, and then he'd just reach out from the cab into the caboose, and——"

"Whoop! Wouldn't that make your hair turn white!" interrupted Sam Day. "That's the biggest whopper I've heard yet."

"It's a true story," answered Shadow, calmly. "If you don't believe it, come to my house some day and I'll show you the toothpick the engineer used after he got through using the dinner pail." And then a shout of laughter arose.

They were climbing a hill and it was not long before they reached the summit where they passed another car at a switch. Here the car was stopped for a few minutes so that all hands might enjoy the scenery, which was beautiful in its bath of moonshine. Then on they went again, down the long slope on the other side, faster and faster, until the car seemed to be fairly flying along.

"Put on the brake there!" shouted Phil, warningly. "You are going too fast. There's a curve at the bottom of the hill, and——"

"The brake's stuck!" was the gasped-out answer. "I—I can't budge it!"

Several leaped forward, but none could move the brake for fully half a minute. By that time the car was going along at lightning-like speed. And now the dreaded curve appeared. It looked as if the trolley car, and all on board, were doomed to destruction!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SURPRISES OF A NIGHT

"STOP her! Stop her!"

"We'll go over, sure!"

All of the students were on their feet and several prepared to leap from the swiftly moving trolley car.

"Don't jump," came from Roger. "I've got the brake on. Don't jump!"

He had at last managed to release the brake from where it was stuck, and now he applied it with all his power. The sparks flew from the wheels as they slid along the steel rails, and the car bumped and creaked over the uneven track. Then they struck the curve, and the front truck left the rails and jammed up tightly into some rocks and dirt. Everybody was thrown forward, and while one boy went over the dashboard, poor Buster Beggs turned a somersault from the roof, and landed in some bushes a dozen feet away.

Shrieks and yells arose. It was, "Get off my back!" here, and "Oh, my leg!" there, while one boy in a corner gasped out, "Somebody's mashing me!" For a full minute pandemonium reigned,

and then, slowly, all began to recover their senses.

"Well, this is the worst yet!" cried Ben, limping from the car. "I guess my little toe is about squashed. How are you, Dave?"

"I'm all right, but I was pretty well squeezed."

"Somebody fish me out of the bushes!" came in a wail from Buster Beggs.

"Buster's been doing the circus act of his life," came from Sam Day.

"Anybody hurt?" questioned Phil, anxiously.

An examination was made, and it was soon ascertained that, while a number had been bruised, nobody was seriously hurt. But all agreed that the shaking up had been so great that nobody wished to try the experience again.

"Talk about a ride by moonlight!" grumbled one of the party. "I'd rather ride a trick mule."

"Well, we can be thankful that nobody was killed," said Dave. "If that brake had remained stuck, some of us would have had a different story to tell."

Most of the students were very sober as they walked around the trolley car. The rear truck was still on the tracks, but the forward wheels were a foot and a half from the rails.

"I don't see how we are to get those wheels back on the track," came from Ben. "A trolley car

weighs a good deal, and we have no tools to work with."

"We must get it back," said Phil. "We can't leave the car here."

"How are we to return to the Hall?" came from another. "We are at least nine miles away."

"Walking is good, Belcher."

"I'm not going to walk," retorted Belcher. "I want my twenty-six cents' worth, and I'm going to ride." And this created a short laugh.

"Perhaps we can pry the wheels back on the tracks," suggested Dave. "Let us get a few fence rails and try it."

There was a rail fence not a great distance away, and soon the boys had several rails. Under the directions of Phil and Dave they were put into position, and flat rocks were placed under them. Then the rest set to work to pry up the front end of the car and the truck with them.

It was hard work, and for half an hour the wheels refused to move as desired. But then more rails were brought into play, and at last the wheels of the truck slipped back on the tracks.

"Hurrah!" shouted Roger. "Back at last! Now, fellows, we had better get aboard once more, and return to where we came from."

"There is to be no hurrying on this trip back," declared Phil. "We must take our time and be sure of what we are doing."

"Right you are," came from Buster. "I don't want any more tumbles." The bushes had scratched his hands and face not a little.

"You keep off the roof, Buster," said Phil. "I don't want anybody to be killed on this trip."

The controller was placed on the other end of the car and the trolley pole switched around, and then the journey back to the starting point was begun. The car seemed to work all right, and they turned on a moderate degree of power.

"We'll have to get back soon," cried Roger, consulting his watch. "Do you know what time it is?"

"Quarter to twelve," said another student.

"Exactly, and do you know that the power is shut off from this line at twelve o'clock?"

"Is that true?" demanded Dave.

"Yes, I heard somebody speaking of it last week. The last car out returns to the car barn at twelve o'clock, and then the power is cut off until six in the morning."

"Then we want to make the most of our time," said Ben. "Give her a little more power on the straight stretches, but mind the brake, and look out for the switches and other cars," and this was done.

Nevertheless, twelve o'clock found them still three miles from the starting point. The power held, however, for a few minutes longer and in that time they covered all but a mile and a quarter of

the distance. Then, just as they were nearing the top of a hill, the power died out completely.

"That ends it," sighed Phil. "Put on the brake, or we'll slide backwards. I don't see why they didn't keep the power on until this car came back."

"I've got a scheme," suggested Roger. "Can't we push the car to the top of the hill? It's only a few yards. Then we can run down the other side without power."

"Hurrah! saved again!" cried one of the crowd. "Come on, everybody!" And out of the car swarmed the club members, Murphy leading. Some got in the rear of the car, and the others on the sides, and all shoved with might and main.

"She's coming! Now, then, all together!" shouted Phil. "Push as if you meant it." And push they did, until the car reached the top of the grade and started to slide down the other side. Then on they leaped once more, and swept downward, until the starting point came into view, where the trolley car was stopped at the exact point where they had got aboard.

The members of the club found the old motorman where they had left him.

"Now, listen," said Phil. "If we give you three dollars will you promise to keep quiet about this affair?"

"Sure," said the motorman, with a grin. He had had to do with Oak Hall and Rockville students before.

"Very well, here's the money," came from the secretary of the Gee Eyes, and it was passed over. Then the trolley fares were also paid, and the students prepared to depart.

"That car will have to remain where she is until morning," said the motorman.

"Then let her stay," said Roger. "You can say there was a slight accident."

"All right," and again the old motorman grinned; he was an easy fellow with whom to deal.

As quickly as possible, the members of the club marched back to the vicinity of Oak Hall. Then two were sent ahead as scouts, to learn if the coast was clear. In a few minutes one came back in a state of excitement.

"Old Job Haskers is around the lower hall!" he announced. "I'm afraid our absence has been discovered."

"In that case our cake is dough," murmured Roger.

"Wait—I'll make certain of this," came from Phil. "Come on, Dave, if you will."

They hurried to the Hall, and slipping into a side door, found the second assistant sitting in a chair, as if on guard.

"He has found out something, otherwise he

wouldn't be down here at this hour of the night," whispered Phil.

"I've got a scheme," whispered Dave in return. The adventures of the night had sharpened his wits. "I'll try to get him into the storeroom yonder. If he goes in, slip into the hall and lock the door on him."

"How will you do it?"

"Wait and see."

Dave tiptoed his way around the building, and pausing at the window of the storeroom began to rattle the blinds and the sash. At first this did not attract Job Haskers' attention, but presently he arose and tiptoed his way into the storeroom to see what it meant.

Phil was watching the assistant master, and as silently as he could he sneaked up, closed the door, and turned the key. Then he ran outside and gave a low but clear whistle.

It was a signal that the coast was clear, and like so many cats the students ran into the Hall and scampered to their dormitories. Some were already partly undressed, and in a very few minutes all were in bed and safe.

As soon as Dave heard the other boys enter the building, he followed, and then of course, the rattling at the window ceased.

"Queer what that was," murmured Job Haskers to himself. "There isn't any wind to-night."

He gazed out of the window, but could see nothing unusual. This done he retraced his steps to the door.

The moment he tried the handle he realized that something was wrong. He felt for the catch of the lock, but found that shoved down. Then he knew he was locked in.

"The young rascals!" he muttered, savagely. "Hi! Let me out!" he roared. "Do you hear? Let me out!"

No one answered his command, and he began to beat upon the door. Then he thumped so loudly that Pop Swingly, the janitor, came up, followed presently by Dr. Clay and Andrew Dale.

"Who's in there?" demanded the janitor, who had armed himself with a club.

"I am, Swingly. Let me out!"

"If it ain't Mr. Haskers!" ejaculated the janitor. "Who locked you in?"

"That is what I'd like to know. Did you see anybody around?"

"Not a soul, sir—everybody has gone to bed."

"No, some of the young rascals are around—I heard them go out hours ago, and I was waiting for them to get back."

"Did you say some of the students were out?" demanded Dr. Clay.

"Yes, sir."

"And they locked you in the storeroom?" asked

Andrew Dale, and smiled to himself in the semi-darkness.

"They did."

"I'll investigate this!" thundered the doctor. "Mr. Dale, look through the dormitories and report who is missing."

"I'll go along," put in Job Haskers.

"These revels at night must cease, and at once," continued the master of Oak Hall. "Make an close investigation, and I will make an example of the offenders."

"I'd just like to punish them," muttered Job Haskers. "The idea of locking me, *me* in the storeroom," and he shook his head bitterly.

The two assistants hurried off, and were gone the best part of quarter of an hour. They had visited every dormitory belonging to the students, and now they reported at the doctor's office.

"Three students are missing," said Andrew Dale. "Augustus Plum, Chipham Macklin, and Nathaniel Poole. We have ascertained that they left the Hall about nine o'clock and have not yet returned."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MISSING COMPOSITION

THE boys in dormitories No. 11 and No. 12 had just had time enough to get to bed when the two assistant teachers appeared. They looked in each bed and then withdrew silently.

"Phew, but that was a narrow squeak!" whispered Ben. "Another minute, and we should have been caught!"

"They are going through every dormitory," announced Phil, whose bed was close to the door. "I hope the others have retired."

To make certain he opened the door on a crack. The two teachers had just entered No. 13. He heard some talking, and when he shut the door again he smiled broadly.

"This is the richest yet, fellows!" he whispered. "What do you think? Plum, Macklin, and Poole are missing, and old Haskers thinks it was one of them that locked him in the storeroom!"

At this announcement there were several smothered laughs.

"They'll catch it—if they are caught," whispered Roger. "Wonder where they went?"

"On a little jollification of their own, I suppose,—just to outdo us," said Sam Day, and he guessed the exact truth.

It was not until a full hour later that a murmur below told them that something more was going on. At the risk of being discovered, Dave and Roger crept out into the hall and listened. A crowd passed from the rear of the Hall to the doctor's private office. In the number were Plum, Poole, and Macklin.

"This is scandalous, scandalous!" they heard Dr. Clay say. "I never could have believed it had I not seen it with my own eyes!"

"It's all right, doc.,—it's all right," came thickly from the bully of the school. "Just celebrated a little, that's all. No harm done."

"Plum, you have been drinking!"

"Only a glass of wine, sir—only one glass. Always drink wine at home."

"So do we," added Nat Poole. "Had a —a—cel'bration, just as Gus says. Pays to cel'brate sometimes—makes the a—a—brain clearer!"

"Go to my office!" thundered Dr. Clay. "I am—I am astounded!" And then the whole crowd passed out of sight and hearing.

"This is awful, and no mistake!" whispered Dave, as he and Roger crept back into the dormitory. "And little Macklin, too!"

"They are bad eggs, no doubt about it," was the answer.

"What was it about?" came from several, as the door was closed.

"Plum, Macklin, and Poole have been caught."

"Humph! Well, I'm not sorry," said Sam Day.

"That isn't the worst of it, fellows," said Dave, soberly. "All of them have been drinking."

"Drinking!" came from several.

"Yes, and the doctor is so astonished and pained he doesn't know what to do."

"That's too bad," said Shadow. "I knew Plum liked a little now and then. But he shouldn't lead Macklin astray."

"What will the doctor do?" asked Beggs. "Perhaps he will send 'em home. It's strictly against the regulations to drink anything stronger than coffee."

The boys talked the matter over for a while, and then one after another dropped to sleep. Dave was the last to doze away.

"It's a pity they can't leave liquor alone," he told himself. "That is the way men make drunkards of themselves. First they take a little and then they take more and more, until they can't get along without it."

At breakfast on the following morning Plum, Poole, and Macklin did not appear, nor were they

present during the day's session. No questions concerning them could be answered, and Dave and his chums really wondered if they had been sent away and for good.

Such, however, was not the case. The three had been locked up in separate rooms of the school and were given the plainest possible fare. Later on Dr. Clay brought them together and gave them a stern lecture.

"Such conduct will not be permitted at Oak Hall while I am the master here," he said. "It is without justification of any kind, and sure to give the academy a bad name. While you are here I expect each of you to conduct himself like a gentleman. You are acting against your own best interests, and if you do not understand that now you will understand it later on. I shall write home to your fathers and explain the situation, and if such a thing occurs again I shall send you home without delay. Now go to your rooms, and prepare your lessons for to-morrow." And thus they were dismissed, and glad to get away from his stern gaze.

"Phew! but I'm thankful he let us off so easily!" said Nat Poole. "I was afraid he was going to tell me to pack my grip right away. And I don't want to go home just yet."

"I don't know what my stepfather will do when he hears of it," said Macklin, gloomily. "Maybe

he'll make me go home and work in his lumber yard. I don't want to do that."

"Write to him and tell him you didn't know what you were drinking—that somebody put up a job on you," suggested Gus Plum. "That's what I am going to do," and the letters were penned without delay.

After this happening matters moved along smoothly at Oak Hall for over a month. Having had such a "calling down" from Dr. Clay the bully and his cronies did not dare to do anything wrong, and Dave and his chums stuck to their lessons. The only break for Dave came at Thanksgiving, when he journeyed to Crumville, to eat his turkey dinner with the Wadsworths and Professor Potts.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," cried Jessie, dancing up to greet him. "You must tell me all about your school, and how you are getting along."

The dinner was a veritable feast, and all sat around the board two hours, eating nuts and raisins and listening to what Dave had to tell.

"Of course you haven't gotten into any scrapes?" remarked Oliver Wadsworth, with an amused twinkle in his eye.

"Not any serious ones, sir. Of course, I've had some fun—it's bound to come in a school like that."

"I know, Dave, and I don't blame you for wanting some sport. But don't neglect your studies."

"His percentages speak for themselves," said Caspar Potts, proudly. "I don't see how they could be much better."

The old professor had improved greatly in health. He was anxious to get to work, or begin teaching again, but Oliver Wadsworth would not hear of it.

"You must rest this winter," said the manufacturer. "Then, next season, you can do as you please."

That evening there was quite a gathering at the house, including the Basswoods, who came with Ben, and the party lasted until nearly midnight. Dave was introduced to many people of Crumville he had never before met, and all treated him cordially.

"You must write me a letter every week, Dave," said Jessie, on parting. "Tell me about all you are doing."

"I can't tell you all that, Jessie," he answered. "I'll write whenever I have anything interesting," and he did.

Autumn was now a thing of the past, and erelong winter began to set in around Oak Hall. The oaks were bare of leaves, and the cold blasts sighed mournfully through the branches. Football came to an end, and so did rowing, and the students began to look forward to snow and skating.

"Last year we had great sport in the snow," said

Buster Beggs. "We built a big snow fort and half the school defended it, while the other half tried to capture the place. The fight lasted all of Saturday afternoon, and the fort fell just as the bell rang for supper."

"Of course you weren't hit with snowballs," said Dave, with a smile.

"Not at all, only about 'steen times, and when they captured the fort I was buried under one of the falling walls and had to be hauled out by the heels. Some of the snow got down my back. I can feel the cold yet!" And Buster gave a shiver.

"I like winter sports," came from Roger. "Best of all, I love skating."

"And so do I," cried Dave. "I like to skate good long distances, too. I don't care so much for fancy skating."

"When skating is good you can go up and down the river for miles," said Phil. "We can take the trip some Saturday."

"Does Gus Plum skate?" asked another boy.

"Yes, he's a fine skater, and last year he won the prize for long-distance skating. My, but wasn't he stuck on himself after that," returned Shadow.

"He is keeping very mum just now," remarked Roger.

"That talking from the doctor has tamed him," said Phil. "But just wait, he'll break out again before long," and the big youth was right.

Dave had turned again to his studies and was making such progress that he was now at the head of his class. Roger was just below him, and Phil and Ben were also doing well.

One windy day Dave was walking along the river bank, when some bits of half-burned paper blew towards him. Out of curiosity he picked up one of the bits and was surprised to see that it contained writing in his own hand.

"My missing composition on the "Three Greatest Achievements of Gearge Washington'!" he murmured to himself, and it was true. "Now, how did this get here?"

He picked up several other bits of paper, and finally traced them to the remains of a small fire which had been built in a hollow among the rocks.

He looked over what there was of sheets in the ashes and sorted out sixteen unburnt bits. Nine were of his lost composition, and the others in another hand.

"I'd like to know whose hand that is," he mused. "Can it be that of Chip Macklin?"

Folding the bits of paper up he placed them in his pocket, and returned to Oak Hall. Entering one of the lower classrooms, he found the teacher and asked if he could look at some of the copybooks there.

"What is your object, Master Porter?" asked the under-teacher, pleasantly.

"I should like to see Macklin's handwriting."

"Oh! Well, here is a composition he just handed in," and then the teacher turned away, for he was busy.

Dave compared the composition with the odd bits of paper and at once reached the conclusion that both had been written by the sneak of the school. He handed the composition back to the teacher, and hurried away. Outside he asked for Macklin, and learned that the boy was up in his dormitory. Going up he found the sneak and Gus Plum together, and both talking earnestly.

"What do you want here?" demanded Plum, sourly, as Dave entered.

"I want to talk to Macklin, Plum. Can I see you alone?" he asked of the sneak.

"What do you want?" was Macklin's question, in alarm.

"I guess you know well enough. Do you want to see me alone or not?"

"I—I don't want to see you at all, Porter," faltered the sneak.

"What do you want of him?" demanded the bully, arising and confronting Dave.

"That is my business, not yours, Plum."

"Macklin is under my protection. If you have anything to say, say it in front of me."

"Do you want me to do that?" asked Dave, of the sneak.

"Ye—es."

"Very well, then, I'll speak. Macklin, I have found you out. You stole my composition on Washington. I have proofs, and it will be useless for you to deny it."

CHAPTER XXVIII

MACKLIN'S CONFESSION

At Dave's accusation the sneak of the school turned pale, and for the moment did not know what to say. There was a painful silence, broken by Gus Plum, who advanced upon the boy from the country with clenched fists.

"See here, I ain't going to stand for this!" he blustered. "Chip is no thief."

"I have spoken the truth," answered Dave, calmly. "I dare Macklin to deny it."

"Ho—how can you prove that I to—took the composition," came faintly from the sneak.

"Never mind, I can prove it, and that's enough. It was a mean piece of business. I had to use another composition not so good in its stead, and it brought down my percentage."

"Don't you let him bulldoze you, Chip," interposed the bully. "I don't believe he can prove it." And he winked suggestively at his toady.

"Do you know what I think, Plum?" continued Dave, hotly. "You and Macklin are in league with each other in this, just as you are in with each other on other shady transactions."

"Really?" sneered the bully. He squared off. "Look here, Porter, I owe you a thrashing and I said I'd give it to you. I reckon the time is ripe for it."

"I told you I'd be ready whenever you were ready, Plum. But that hasn't anything to do with this affair. I ask you, Macklin, what you have to say for yourself."

"I—I——"

"Don't answer him, Chip. He can't prove anything. It's only bluster on his part. Keep your mouth shut."

Again there was a painful pause. Then without warning Dave stepped forward and caught the sneak by the ear.

"Did you hear me?" he asked, sharply. "Did you hear me?"

"Oh! oh!" shrieked the sneak. "Oh, let go, Porter, please let go!" And he began to squirm.

"Answer my question."

"I—I can't answer. I—I didn't do anything. I—I found some sheets of a composition that had —had blown out of a window——"

"That's a fairy tale, Macklin, you——"

Dave got no further, for Gus Plum was on him and catching him by the arm, flung him backward. Instantly the two squared off. Plum struck at the country boy, and hit him in the shoulder, and Dave retaliated with a sharp crack

on the bully's jaw that sent Plum staggering against a table.

"I told you to keep out, Plum," said Dave, warmly.

"I'll—I'll fix you!" growled the bully, and leaped forward once more. He managed to strike Dave on the forehead, a blow that hurt not a little.

Dave was now thoroughly aroused, and he sprang at the bully with vigor, and blows were given and taken with astonishing rapidity. Around and around the dormitory went the two boys, knocking over a chair, and a shelf containing a number of books. Once they bumped into Macklin, but the sneak lost no time in getting out of the way. He wanted to trip Dave up, but could see no chance for so doing.

Dave had been struck half a dozen times, and it must be confessed that he was fast losing his wind. Yet the thought of giving up never once occurred to him. He continued to strike at Plum, and the bully caught a stinging blow in the eye that made him see stars. Then gathering his strength, Dave sent in one awful blow on Plum's chin that raised the bully from his feet and sent him crashing over a bed and on his back.

"No—now, have you had enough?" Dave asked, coming up to Plum with his fists still clenched tightly.

In a dazed fashion the bully of Oak Hall looked up. He saw something in Dave's eyes that made him shiver—that look which made the country boy at times truly dangerous.

"Here comes somebody!" cried Macklin, at this juncture, and a second later the door swung open and Job Haskers strode in.

"What is the meaning of this noise up here?" demanded the assistant teacher, sharply. "It sounds as if you were pulling the school building down. Ha! you have been fighting!"

"No—no, we weren't fighting," panted Plum, sitting up on the bed.

"Not fighting?"

"No—no, sir,—we were only having a—er—a little wrestling match."

"That's it," came from Macklin, who was anxious to shield his champion. "It didn't amount to anything."

"Sorry we made so much noise, Mr. Haskers," continued the bully, smoothly. He was fast recovering.

Job Haskers looked at Dave.

"What have you to say, Master Porter?"

"I haven't anything to say, Mr. Haskers."

"Were you simply wrestling with Master Plum?"

Dave was silent.

"Answer me!"

"Of course, we were wrestling—quite a friendly affair," came from the bully. And he looked suggestively at the country boy.

The assistant teacher continued to look at Dave, and caught him by the arm.

"Then it was a strictly friendly affair, eh?" he went on, searchingly. "I did not know that you and Master Plum were such great friends."

"We are not friends, Mr. Haskers. I don't want the friendship of such a fellow as Plum. I came here on business, and—well, I don't care to say anything more. But we are not friends, and I don't want anybody to think so."

As these words issued from Dave's lips Gus Plum glared at him, in anger. Macklin was also disturbed.

"Then it was a fight, eh?"

Dave continued to remain silent.

"If you must know the truth, Mr. Haskers, I'll tell you," cried Gus Plum. "Porter came in here and accused Macklin and myself of something we didn't do. He called Macklin a thief, and a lot more, and flocked it into me, too. I stood as much as I could, and then talked back. Then he pitched into me; didn't he, Chip?"

"He certainly did," answered Chip, catching the cue. "It was all Porter's fault, if you must know."

"Mr. Haskers——" commenced Dave, and

then stopped short. He knew it would be useless to try to defend himself in the eyes of the second assistant.

"Come down to Dr. Clay's office," thundered the teacher. "Come down, all of you."

There was no help for it, and in a few minutes more the three students were in the office, and the doctor was listening to what his assistant had to say. Then, much to that individual's astonishment, he told Job Haskers he might go.

"But, Dr. Clay——"

"You can go. I will settle this myself," said the doctor, and the assistant walked out, much chagrined, for he had hoped to remain and see Dave punished.

Neither Dave nor Plum was in the best of condition, so far as appearances went. The bully had a black eye and a cut chin, while Dave's nose was swollen and his collar and necktie were torn. Dr. Clay looked from one to the other curiously, and also at Macklin, who was trembling.

"You must have had quite a fight," said he, shortly. "Who struck the first blow?"

"He did," said Plum, pointing to Dave. "And abused Macklin, too; didn't he, Chip?"

"He did."

"What have you to say, Porter?"

"Dr. Clay, will you allow me to tell my whole story?" asked the country boy, earnestly. "I

didn't expect to expose anybody, but I suppose it can't be helped—now."

"Go ahead, but don't take too long," was the brief reply.

In as few words as possible Dave told him how he had missed the composition and seen Macklin coming from the dormitory. Then he told of finding the bits of half-burned paper, and he brought them forth. He also told of how the bully and the sneak had treated him in general.

"I didn't intend to fight when I went after Macklin," he continued. "I wanted him to know that I had found him out, and I was going to make him promise to do better in the future. But Plum stood up for the sneak, and pitched into me, and I had to defend myself. Then I—well, I guess I lost my temper, and I knocked Plum over the bed."

After this the bully and the sneak were closely questioned, and the doctor looked over the bits of burnt paper which Dave had in his pocket.

"Macklin, I want you to answer me truthfully," said Dr. Clay, looking the youngest boy closely in the eyes. "Did you, or did you not, take that composition?"

The sneak tried to evade that gaze, but could not. He started to speak several times, but the words would not come.

"Answer me!"

" I—I thought it was some old composition—I didn't think it was of much value! " whined Macklin, at last.

" Did you try to burn it up as soon as you took it? "

" No, sir, I—I kept it. I was going to put it back the next day, but—but——"

" But what? " thundered the doctor.

" Oh, please don't ask me, Dr. Clay."

" I demand an answer, Macklin. Do you want to be dismissed from the Hall? "

" No! no! But if I answer Plum will kill me, I know he will," whined the sneak.

" Did Plum tell you to burn it? "

" We—we burned it together—along with some old writing of my own."

" I didn't have anything to do with it," burst out the bully. " Just you wait, Chip——"

" Silence, Plum! So, then, you burned it together? "

" Yes, sir. I was—was scared—but Gus said it would be all right, that nobody would find it out! " Macklin burst into tears. " Oh, Dr. Clay, please don't send me home, please don't! I won't do such a thing again, I promise I won't! Please don't send me home! My stepfather will kill me if I'm sent home! "

Macklin was on his knees, and the bitter tears were streaming down his face as he clutched at Dr.

Clay's frock coat. The master of the Hall was affected and looked at Dave.

"Dr. Clay, please don't punish him on my account," said Dave, swallowing a lump that arose in his throat. "I—I don't care about the composition—let it pass, won't you? If he's got a stepfather——" He did not finish.

"You are quite sure you will behave yourself in the future, if I do as Master Porter suggests, Chipham?"

"Yes, sir—oh, yes, sir!" came eagerly.

"It was a wicked thing to do, and I do not wonder that Master Porter was angry when he found it out. You can go now. I will talk it over with you later—after I have finished with Master Plum. Porter, you can go, too. After this, if you have any more troubles, bring them to me before you try to settle them yourself."

A moment later Macklin left the office, and Dave followed, leaving the bully alone with the master of Oak Hall. What was said or done to Gus Plum never became known to the outsiders, but half an hour later he came forth looking very humble, and for some weeks after that he kept himself well within bounds and attended strictly to his studies.

CHAPTER XXIX

TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF

CHIP MACKLIN was going straight to his dormitory when Dave hurried up to him, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Let me go!" said the sneak, doggedly. "You said you were willing to let it pass——"

"And I am, Chip. Come, take a walk with me. I want to talk to you."

"I don't want to talk."

"You had better come. I'm not going to hurt you. I want to talk for your own good."

The younger boy hesitated for a moment, and then turned partly around.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Come up to the old lumber room. It's warm there and quiet, too," and Dave led the way to an apartment filled with odds and ends of all sorts. Here they sat down on some boxes.

"Chip, I am going right to the point, for I don't think it pays to beat around the bush," commenced Dave. "I want to know why you don't turn over a new leaf and be a better boy? Nobody likes a sneak, and it ought to be beneath you to toady to Gus Plum. If you'd give up your sneaking ways,

and give up toadying to that bully, I'm sure all the other fellows would like you a great deal more than they do now."

At this unexpected outburst Chip Macklin was silent for a moment.

"You're a good enough fellow, in general," went on Dave, earnestly. "You're pretty good at your lessons, and pretty good other ways, too, and I know some boys like you when you are not following after Plum. Another thing, to my mind, Plum is on the downward road, and if you keep on following him, sooner or later you'll get into some trouble that will bring you dismissal from the Hall. Your stepfather won't like that, and neither will your mother."

At these words Chip Macklin's head sank on his breast.

"If I were you, I'd cut Gus Plum dead after this, and I think I'd cut Nat Poole, too, although he isn't quite so bad as Plum, only foolish. Those fellows will never help you to make a man of yourself, and both of them will never help you in your studies, for each is near the bottom of his class."

"I know they don't study much—and they don't let me study as much as I wish. But what can I do —I'm in their dormitory. And Plum will half kill me now!" Macklin showed signs of breaking down again.

"We'll get Dr. Clay to put you in some other

dormitory. Will Fellen is leaving No. 11. How would that suit you? There's a prime set of boys in No. 11."

"They won't want me—not after what I've done," answered the smaller student, gloomily.

"I'll try to fix it up for you—that is, if you'll promise to turn over a new leaf."

"Do you mean it, Dave?"

"I do, Chip. I want to see you make something of yourself. I don't want to see anybody throw himself away for such a fellow as Plum. If you'll turn over a new leaf, and he tries to abuse you, I'll stand up for you."

"Will you, really?" Chip Macklin's face brightened. "Oh, you don't mean that!"

"I do; did you ever know me break my word?"

"It's good of you, Dave. I don't deserve this. It was mean to play the sneak on you, and steal that composition. But honestly, I was going to put the paper back. I was scared to death the minute after I took it. Plum got me to take it—or, at least, he suggested the thing to me. He's always suggesting something for me to do."

"Well, don't listen to him after this."

"I won't, I'll promise you, and I'll—I'll do my level best to be all right after this, too." The smaller boy caught Dave's hand. "I will do it, yes, I will!"

Quite a talk followed, and Dave continued to

give Chip Macklin some good advice. They parted friends, and then Dave sought out Dr. Clay again. The doctor listened to his story with deep interest.

"I do not imagine that Plum will trouble Macklin in the future," said the master of Oak Hall. "Still, if Macklin wishes to take the vacant bed in dormitory No. 11, he can do so. I will speak to Mr. Dale about it. It is to your credit that you have advised the youth to turn over a new leaf. And now let me give you a bit of advice, Porter. Try to keep your temper after this. It often pays to go slow."

"I know it, doctor, but—but——"

"I understand, and I am not going to punish you. Only remember that I want my pupils to be gentlemen."

As soon as it was announced that Chip Macklin was coming into dormitory No. 11, various were the comments from those already occupying that apartment and No. 12.

"We don't want him. He's nothing but a miserable sneak!" said one, and that was the opinion of the majority.

"Look here, fellows, I want to tell you something," said Dave, earnestly, and he spoke briefly of his encounter with Plum and his talk with Macklin. "Now, I'm satisfied Chip wants to turn over a new leaf. But he can't do it if he's kept under

Plum's thumb. Let us give him a fair chance. I've found out that he has a stepfather who is rather harsh with him, and he doesn't get hardly any spending money. Plum used to bribe him to do things, and when Chip didn't have a cent it was a great temptation. Let's try to make a man of him. Come now, what do you say?" And thus Dave talked for a good hour.

"Say, Dave, you ought to be a lawyer," cried Roger. "You'd do finely defending criminals. If it's as you say, I'm willing to give Macklin all the show he wants."

"Yes, and I'll help him if I can," added Ben.

"I didn't know he was poor and had a hard-hearted stepfather," said the boy who was considered the leader of No. 11. "He can come in here and welcome, eh, fellows?"

"Yes, let him come!" was the cry, and so it was settled. Dave helped the small boy to bring in his things, and two or three of the others gave a hand to help him settle down. He felt strange at first, and exceedingly suspicious, but gradually these feelings wore away, and he became quite another lad.

"Don't you wish yourself back in No. 13?" asked Dave, one day, after he had helped Chip to do an extra hard example.

"No, no!" was the quick answer. "I never want to go back! It is ever so much better here.

I can see now what a fool I was, Dave, to toady to Plum, and to play the sneak for him. I never want to do those things again!"

"Has he bothered you since you came?"

"Not yet. I—I haven't given him the chance. Once, I was walking along by the boathouse, and he came after me. But I ran back into the school."

"You might as well face him next time, just to see what he has to say. Show him that you are not afraid of him. It's the only way to treat such a bully."

Gus Plum had expected to pitch into Macklin for exposing the truth concerning the composition, and the bully was much chagrined to find the small boy leaving dormitory No. 13.

"He knew better than to stay in this room," grumbled Plum to Nat Poole. "Just the same, I am sorry to lose him—he was such a handy little sneak to have around."

"Did everything you wanted done, didn't he?"

"Almost everything. He was hard up, and ten cents or a quarter looked as big as the moon to him."

"Are his folks so poor?"

"No, but his stepfather don't believe in extravagance."

"Porter must have hit you pretty hard?" went on Poole, after a pause.

"Pooh! It was nothing to what I gave him.

Didn't you notice his front teeth? They are all loose."

This was a falsehood, but Poole was willing to take Plum's word for it, and it soon became noised around that the bully had given Dave a sound beating. Poole added that the fight had lasted half an hour, and that Plum had had the better of it from start to finish.

Of course, Dave denied the story, and so did Macklin, yet many believed the tale, and as a consequence Gus Plum was looked up to by them as the king of the academy. Later on, one or two new pupils became his toadies, in place of Macklin.

Winter had now set in, and erelong there came a fall of snow, followed by a cold snap which put an inch of ice on the surface of the river. Then followed more snow, covering the ground to a depth of half a foot on a level, although the wind swept it into drifts in some places and left other spots, and especially the river, almost clear.

"Whoop! hurrah for a snowballing match!" cried Roger, rushing in. "This snow is glorious! It packs just right!"

Some of the students were already snowballing each other, and poor Pop Swingly, who was trying to clean off one of the walks, had been hit several times, and so had Horsehair Lemond, who was helping at the task.

"Two cents for a shot, Pop!" cried one student, and before an answer could be given, the snowball was launched forth, to catch the janitor in the back.

"Here's a new act in the thrilling drama, 'Buried in the Snow!'" cried another to Horsehair, and sent down on him an avalanche of snow from a window sill above.

"Hi! hi! don't you be after buryin' me alive!" roared the stage driver. "Just wait till I catch you," he added, as he emerged from the snow heap. "We'll have a new act called 'Having His Ears Boxed!'" and he shook his fist at his tormentor.

Dave and his friends were soon in the midst of the sport, and then the snowballs flew faster than ever. It was jolly fun and everybody enjoyed it to the utmost. In the crowd was Macklin, who took the hits he got in good part, and gave almost as good as was sent.

"Hi! Dave, here comes old Haskers!" said Phil, presently. "I'm going to square up for being kept in yesterday." And off he ran, with Dave at his heels, and Ben following.

The second assistant had been down to the barn on some errand. Now he turned toward the deserted boathouse. Following him up, the boys took a position behind one of the clumps of oaks near by.

"All ready?" whispered Phil.

"Yes."

"Then throw!" And away whizzed three snowballs. One took the teacher in the shoulder, another landed on his neck, while the third filled up his ear. Then he started to run, but pitched headlong.

"You scamps!" he roared, on picking himself up. "I'll fix you for that!" He gazed around without seeing anybody. "Where are you? Come, it won't do you any good to hide!"

"Ready again?" asked Ben. "We may as well make a good job of it, while we are about it."

All were ready, and as Job Haskers looked in the opposite direction they let fly once more. Each of the snowballs landed on the teacher's head, and one sent his hat flying through the air.

"You scamps! You wretches!" shrieked the second assistant. "Don't dare to throw at me again! If you do I'll—I'll have you sent from the Hall!"

"Once again!" whispered Dave, and again the snowballs were launched forth. Job Haskers tried to dodge, but it was useless. He was hit again; and then his three tormentors ran off, keeping the clump of oaks between the teacher and themselves, that he might not discover their identity.

CHAPTER XXX

A RACE ON THE ICE

"HURRAH, Dave, the ice is six inches thick on the river, and Dr. Clay says we can go skating as much as we please during off hours!"

It was Roger who brought in the good news, as he entered the general library of Oak Hall, where Dave, Ben, and a number of others were reading. It was a clear, sunshiny day, but nipping cold.

"Good!" answered Dave, throwing down his book. "I'm going to see if my skates are O. K. They are rather old, but I've had lots of fun out of them."

"I've got a new pair," said Roger. "Got them for a birthday present."

The boys soon had their skates, and a crowd of a dozen or more started for the river. It was three days after the snowballing, and though Job Haskers had tried his best to find out who had attacked him, nothing had come of the investigation.

When they arrived on the ice, they found Gus Plum and Nat Poole already there. Each of the rich lads had a pair of silver-plated skates of which he was very proud. Dave's skates were of the

plainest kind of steel, having cost but sixty-five cents, and Nat Poole stuck up his nose at them.

"My! look at the gunboats," he observed, to Gus Plum, but loud enough for Dave to hear. "Made of cast-off railroad iron, I guess."

"Let's take up a collection for a new pair," answered the bully of Oak Hall.

"If Dave is satisfied with his skates you ought to be," came sharply from Ben.

"Who is talking to you?" demanded Plum, roughly.

"I'm talking to you, Gus Plum."

"Oh, don't mind him, Ben," interposed Dave. "His talk isn't worth listening to. His skates may have cost more money than mine, but, just the same, I don't think he can skate any faster on them than I can on this old pair."

"Do you want to prove that?" cried Gus Plum, eagerly. He was really a good skater.

"Yes."

"A race! A race!" was the cry.

"I'll race you, too," put in Nat Poole.

"All right, I'd just as lief beat two as one," answered Dave, and said it so dryly that the crowd began to laugh.

The details of the race were quickly arranged. Up the river about half a mile was a small island. The three racers were to start from the boathouse

dock, round the island, and come back to the starting point.

"You've got to hump yourself, Dave," whispered Phil. "Plum is a dandy skater. He has won more than one match."

"And Nat Poole is a good skater, too," added Ben. "He won the race at Bedloe Lake last winter."

"I think I can beat them," returned the country youth, confidently. As he had said before, he did not attempt fancy skating, but loved long stretches, and his wind was good, as had been proved on the football field.

The three contestants lined up, and at the word from a youth selected to act as starter they were off like a shot, side by side.

"That's a fine start," observed Buster Beggs.

A hundred yards were quickly covered, and then Dave shot ahead like an arrow from a bow.

"Porter is in the lead!" was the cry.

"Never mind, the race is young yet!" came back from one of Gus Plum's cronies.

On and on went the contestants, their skates making a sharp grinding on the glassy surface of the river. A few of the boys went after them, to see that each rounded the island properly.

By the time the island was gained Plum and Poole made a spurt and came up abreast of Dave. The latter was on the outside, and so had to make

the largest sweep around, and this made him lose about a yard.

"Plum is ahead!"

"Yes, but Nat Poole is a close second!"

Down the homestretch came the three skaters, the steel runners grinding into the glassy surface more furiously than ever. The pace was a terrific one, and Poole was beginning to lose his wind.

"See, Dave Porter is creeping up!"

It was true, and at the same time Poole began to lose his place beside Gus Plum. The aristocratic youth was now almost winded, while both the bully and Dave were comparatively fresh. Inch by inch the country boy drew forward, until he and Poole were abreast.

"Poole and Porter are tied!"

There now remained but two hundred yards more, and Gus Plum put on an extra spurt which carried him still further in the lead.

"It's Plum's race!"

"With Porter as second!"

It was true that Dave was now ahead of Nat Poole, who, as soon as he was out-distanced, gave up completely. Dave saw that the bully was at least five yards ahead of him. Could he close in on such a lead?

"I must!" he told himself, and shut his teeth hard. He bent forward for another spurt, and like a flash he was almost on Plum's heels.

"Porter is crawling up!"

"Hurry up, Dave!" screamed Roger. "You can do it, old man! Go it!"

"He can't catch Gus Plum," came back from another student, but even as the lad spoke, Dave gave another spurt, and came up alongside of the bully.

"It's a neck-and-neck race!" was the shout.

The line was now less than twenty yards away and still Dave and Plum were side by side. The pace was terrific, and the country boy felt as if something must burst within him. But now he made another spurt, and shot ahead fully a yard—and then the line was crossed.

"Hurrah! Dave Porter wins the race!"

At once Dave was surrounded by his admirers, who shook hands with him, patted him on the back, and led him to a seat in the warm boathouse.

"It was great!" said Shadow, enthusiastically. "Simply great!"

"I congratulate you, Dave," put in Phil. "My! but that will make Plum feel sick all over."

"My skate came loose," said Nat Poole to the crowd on the ice. "If it hadn't been for that, I should have won."

"I got caught in a crack," said the bully.

"Poor excuses are worse than none," said Sam Day, and slipped away to join his friends. The race was the talk of the school for several days, and

for the time being Dave was looked up to as the champion skater of Oak Hall. Nothing more was said about his owning nothing but an old pair of skates.

"The skates don't count as much as the fellow who wears 'em," said Ben, and the others agreed with him.

"I'm awfully glad you won, Dave," said Chip Macklin, in private. "It will help to take the conceit out of Plum and Poole."

"Maybe, but I doubt it," was Dave's reply. "They are too thick-skinned to be affected so easily."

The skating continued good, and on the following Saturday, Dave, Roger, Ben, and Phil arranged for a long outing up the river. They expected to be gone all day and took their dinners with them.

"This is just the kind of an outing I love," said Dave, as they spun along over the ice. "We ought to cover a good many miles before we get back."

"Let us skate as far as the old castle," said Phil. "I haven't visited that spot for years."

"What sort of a place is it?" questioned Ben.

"It's a tumbled-down brick-and-stone building that was erected during the Revolutionary War, so they say. It's on a branch of the river, and I think it's deserted. We can build a fire in the old place and have our dinners there."

So it was arranged, and the party proceeded on its way. The river made many turns, and in spots they had to bend low to escape the overhanging branches. But, generally speaking, the skating was good, and by half-past eleven they came in sight of the old building Phil had described.

"It does look a little like a castle," said Ben. "Who owns it?"

"It belongs to some estate, I think," answered Phil. "Some of the heirs are missing, so the matter has never been settled."

"And nobody lives here?"

"So I've been told. Once a gang of tramps took possession, but the folks over at Riverdale chased them away."

"There is somebody at the place now," said Dave. "Don't you see the smoke pouring from that half tumbled-down chimney?"

"Dave is right," said Roger. "It's too bad! I thought that we'd have the place all to ourselves."

"Perhaps some other boys are here," said Phil. "Let us find out, anyway."

They skated to the lower end of the old building and there took off their skates. Then they entered through a wide-open doorway, and found themselves in a long hall, dark, dingy, and covered with cobwebs. At one side was a stairway leading to an upper floor, and on the other,

and to the rear, various doors leading to the lower rooms.

"This is certainly gloomy enough," remarked Dave. "And cold enough, too."

"Feels to me like a vault, or a tomb," said Ben. "Any ghosts around? Every first-class old castle has its ghosts, you know."

"This isn't first-class enough to have one," answered Phil, with a grin.

From one of the rooms they heard a murmur of voices. Two men were talking earnestly. They also detected the odor of something cooking.

"They must be tramps," whispered Ben.

"Yes, but as there are only two of them, there is nothing to be afraid of," returned Roger.

"I don't think they'll like to be disturbed," said Dave.

"They haven't any more right here than we have," put in Phil. "If they—Hark!"

He stopped short and the four boys listened intently.

"They are quarreling," exclaimed Roger.

"Yes, and it's over some money. I believe they'll be fighting in another minute," added Dave.

"I say I want the money you promised to me," said one of the men in the room. "You can't put me off any longer."

"Now, just keep cool, Billy," was the answer in

a cold, smooth voice. "There is no use of your getting excited."

"Ain't there? Well, hang my toplights, but I think there is! You think because I'm nothing but an old seadog an' not used to land ways you can pull the wool over my eyes, don't you, Tag Dutch? But you ain't goin' to git the best o' old Billy Dill, not by a jugful!"

"I don't intend to get the best of you, Billy."

"Yes, you do. You're a slick rooster, you are, an' I've a notion ye ain't honest nuther. I want my money, an' then we'll part hawsers, an' you can sail your course an' I'll sail mine."

"I think I know one of those men!" whispered Dave, excitedly. "Let me look through the keyhole of that door." He knelt down and did so. "Just as I thought, Roger! One of those men is the rascal who robbed your father's summer home!"

CHAPTER XXXI

SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

THE declaration that Dave made filled all of his companions with astonishment. All knew the particulars of the occurrence mentioned, and knew that the evildoer had not yet been handed over to justice.

"You are sure he is the man, Dave?" queried the senator's son.

"Yes, I know him not only by his looks but by his voice as well."

"You don't want to make any mistake about this," said Phil. "Accusing a man of a robbery is no slight thing to do. If you made a mistake you might get yourself into serious trouble."

"I am positive," said Dave. "The question is, what ought we to do?"

"Let us capture him," said Ben.

"That may be easier said than done."

"We are four to two."

"And that other man seems to be honest—by the way he talks," said Phil.

"Let us arm ourselves with clubs," suggested Roger. "We must certainly capture that robber,

even if the other man gets away. What we want —Oh!"

"Don't! don't hit me like that, Tag Dutch!" came from the room. "Don't!" And then they heard the fall of a body to the floor.

"You brought it on yourself—you're not going to expose me just yet," muttered the other man.

"Come on—let us go in!" cried Dave. "He has knocked that other man down. He may kill him!"

They burst open the door and rushed into the room. A glance sufficed to show them one man in a sailor garb, on the floor, unconscious. Over him stood the other fellow, well dressed, with a thick stick in his grasp.

"Drop that club!" cried Roger. "Drop it, or it will be the worse for you," and he swung his skates in the air.

"Wha—what do you boys want here?" demanded the man, in astonishment. "Where did you come from?" and the club went down to his side.

"I guess you know me," cried Dave, confronting him.

"Why—er—I—I don't know you at all."

"Well, I know you, and that is of more importance just now. You are the rascal that robbed Senator's Morr's summer home."

"And you are going to prison for it," added

Roger, and coming up behind the man he caught him by the arms. "Help me, boys; throw him down, and make him a prisoner."

"Not to-day!" roared the man, and struck out savagely with his club. He hit Dave a glancing blow on the arm, and the country boy retaliated by swinging his skates into the rascal's face. Then all sprang upon the man, and he was thrown to the floor. He struggled fiercely, but he was no match for so many, and at last they had him bound, hands and feet, with their skate-straps.

"You'll be sorry for this," said the rascal, glaring at Dave.

"I don't think so. You ought to be in prison," and Dave turned away to look at the man who had fallen to the floor.

He was of middle age, rather stout, and with a face that was browned and weather-beaten. It was not a bad face to look at, although just now the blood was streaming down one cheek from a cut on the temple. The man was unconscious and breathing heavily.

"He must have been hit pretty hard," was Phil's comment. "He is knocked out clean."

"Do you think he is dying?" questioned Ben.

"No, I don't think that. But he ought to have medical attention."

"Oh, he'll come around," growled the rascal

who was a prisoner. "I didn't hit him half hard enough."

"I think you were trying to cheat him out of some money," was Dave's comment. "It sounded that way to me."

"Oh, he wanted too much," was the answer, and after that the prisoner said but little about the other man.

The boys talked the matter over among themselves, and at last it was decided that Roger and Ben should skate back as far as Rockville and inform the authorities of what had happened, while Dave and Phil watched the prisoner and the unconscious man.

"And see that that fellow doesn't escape," said the senator's son, on departing.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the man who was bound, as soon as the others had gone.

"Going to hand you over to the police," answered Dave.

"You won't gain anything by that."

"That remains to be seen."

"Tell you what I'll do, boys. Let me off and I'll make it worth your while."

"Do you want to buy us off?" queried Phil, curiously.

"You might as well make fifty dollars or so as not," and the prisoner winked suggestively.

"Tell me one thing first," said Dave, pinching Phil's arm. "Why did you rob Senator Morr's home?"

"I was down on my luck and desperate, that's why," was the answer. "I am no regular criminal."

"That's enough!" cried Dave, triumphantly. "Phil, you heard him acknowledge his crime."

"I did, Dave."

"Then you won't let me go!" ejaculated the rascal, in a rage.

"No, sir, not for a million dollars," answered Dave.

"We are not that kind," added Phil.

"I wish I could get at you—I'd show you a thing or two," growled the man, and after that said little more.

Getting some water, Dave washed the face of the sufferer on the floor, and tried to stop the flow of blood. Over a fire in the open chimney place a pot of coffee was boiling and he poured a little of this down the man's throat. There was a groan soon after this, and the man opened his eyes and stared around him.

"How do you feel?" asked Dave, sympathetically.

Instead of replying the man fixed his eyes on the country boy in mingled wonder and amazement.

"You!" he gasped. "You, of all persons on earth! How did you get here?"

These words astonished Dave and he looked the man over once more. To the best of his knowledge he had never seen the fellow before.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

"Do I—I know you? Hang my toplights, what a question to ask an old friend. You look mighty young. Where's your mustache?"

"My mustache? I never had one," and Dave had to smile at the question.

The man gave a groan, and closed his eyes. "Queer—it must be my head. I thought I was aboard the old ship again, down in the South Seas. Oh, how my head hurts!"

"Do you know somebody that looks like me?" asked Dave.

"Do I? Say, I don't know anybody that looks like you—I know *you!*" The man waved his hand feebly. "Did you hit me on the head? It was a mean thing for an old friend to do, keelhaul me if it wasn't!" And then he lapsed into unconsciousness again.

"His mind is wandering," said Phil. "Poor chap! that crack was too much for him."

"He talked strangely enough," mused Dave. "Perhaps he knows somebody that resembles me."

"Who is this man?" asked Phil of the prisoner.

"Better ask him?" growled the criminal.

"I think I heard him call himself Billy Dill, and he called that rascal Tag Dutch," said Dave.

"I am not Tag Dutch!" roared the prisoner. "I am—er—my name is William Jones."

"Is it possible?" said Dave. "When I met you last you said your name was Peter Snodgrass, and you were carrying a valise with the initials, W. F. F. on it. I guess you are a regular barometer for changes."

"Oh, don't you try to joke me," was the grumbling answer.

While the boys were waiting they ate their dinner, and Dave did what little he could for the man who had been struck down. He hoped the man would talk some more, but not a word came from his lips.

It was nearly two hours before Roger and Ben returned, bringing with them two officers of the law, a doctor, and a large hand-sleigh. The officers took charge of the prisoner and handcuffed him, and the physician turned his attention to the sufferer.

"A nasty blow," said he, after an examination. "It looks to me as if his skull was cracked. The best we can do is to put him on the sleigh and take him to the hospital."

Blankets had been brought along with the sleigh, and the wounded man was made as comfortable as possible with these. He was propped up in a seat;

and away the whole party started for Rockville, arriving there towards the close of the short winter day. At the town the prisoner was locked in jail and the sufferer was taken to a hospital supported by one of the local churches. This done, Roger telegraphed to his father, and then the boys skated back to Oak Hall.

The news the party brought caused a sensation, and again Dave was hailed as a hero. But he denied that he had done anything wonderful, and said the evildoer would never have been captured had it not been for the others. Later on it was learned that the man's right name was Taggart Dutch, and that he was wanted for half a dozen robberies. He was tried and sentenced to prison for several years, and a portion of the jewelry stolen by him was recovered.

Senator Morr was warm in his praise of Dave, and insisted upon making the youth a present of a fine ring. This Dave prized highly and he was very proud of the gift.

At Taggart Dutch's trial it came out that the sailor, Bill Dill, had had nothing to do with the rascal's evil doings. Bill Dill had come home from a long ocean trip only a few weeks before, and had traveled to the vicinity of Rockville to look up some friends. The friends were dead, and Dill had fallen in with Taggart Dutch, who had borrowed money from the old tar and tried to make a tool of

him. But in this the robber had failed; and the quarrel, as already described, had been the consequence. How much Taggart Dutch owed the sailor could not be ascertained. He said it was but two dollars, but Dave and a number of others suspected it was much more.

"They would never quarrel like that over two dollars," said Dave.

"I've heard of tramps quarreling over a dime," answered Roger. "And sometimes they shoot each other, too."

"But this Billy Dill is no tramp, Roger—he looks to me like a pretty decent sort of sailor."

"That is true. It is queer he thought he knew you."

"Yes, that is queer, and some day I want to ask him about it. But he is too sick yet."

What Dave said about the old tar being sick was true. As the days went by, instead of growing better, Billy Dill appeared to grow worse, until the doctors attending him thought that he would die. Around Christmas time, when Dave and Roger paid him a visit, he was at his lowest, and, somehow, this made Dave feel very sober.

"If he knows anything of my past, I trust he doesn't die with the secret," said he, and he prayed that the sailor might recover. When he journeyed to Crumville for the holidays he told Mr. Wadsworth about the tar, and to please his protégé the

rich manufacturer had a specialist go and examine the man.

"He will recover," said the man of science, after the examination was concluded. "But it will take time, most likely four or five months."

"And will he be in his right mind, doctor?" asked Dave, eagerly.

"I think so," was the cautious reply. "Still, I cannot vouch for that. Nature must take its own course, so far as his mind is concerned. We can look only after the body."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE OPENING OF THE BASEBALL SEASON

After the holidays time moved along swiftly at Oak Hall without anything of special interest happening. Dave gave his studies every attention, to the satisfaction not only of Professor Potts and Mr. Wadsworth, but likewise of Dr. Clay.

"That Porter is a lad after my own heart," said the doctor to Andrew Dale. "He studies hard, plays hard, and puts his whole soul into whatever he is doing."

"You are right, doctor," answered the first assistant. "Isn't it strange that he knows nothing of his past? Certainly he comes from no common stock."

"It is strange, and for his sake I trust the mystery is some day cleared up, and to his advantage."

During the four months following the holidays both Gus Plum and Nat Poole let Dave and his chums severely alone. Losing the skating race made the bully of Oak Hall feel sick, and he did not wish to risk a defeat of any other sort at the

hands of the country boy. When he saw Dave on the ice he kept at a distance, and it was the same on the playground or in the gymnasium.

Once during that time Plum and Poole caught Chip Macklin skating alone some distance from the academy. Both tried to bully the former sneak, but he stood his ground bravely and they found they could do little with him.

"I'm done with both of you, and I want you to know it," said Macklin. "I was a big fool to be a toady to anybody."

"And what are you now—a toady to Dave Porter," sneered Gus Plum.

"No, I am not, Gus. But if I was, it would be better than doing your bidding," answered Macklin, and skated off, leaving Plum and Poole staring after him. The bully wanted to pitch into the smaller boy, but, somehow did not dare.

"This is some more of Porter's work," grumbled Poole. "Before you know it, Gus, he'll have the whole school down on us."

"Never mind; just wait till I get the chance—I'll square up with him," answered the bully of the Hall, vindictively.

As the winter passed, the boys turned their attention to spring sports, and it was not long before baseball was the chief topic outside of school hours. During the previous season the Hall had had a good club, but had lost several important games,

including the annual " try-out " with Rockville Military Academy.

" We must do better this season," said Phil, who was captain of the nine. " Rockville has crowed over us long enough on the ball field."

" Dave, you said you loved to play ball," said Roger.

" I do," was the ready reply. " But I don't think I can play well enough to go on the Hall nine."

" We'll try you," said Phil. " Every year we try a dozen candidates, you know."

Phil was captain of the club, and played second base, while Roger was one of the catchers, alternating with Shadow Hamilton, who played first base. Sam Day played right field, and the other positions were, or rather, had been, filled by various players. A boy named Carden had been the principal pitcher during the previous season, but he had left the school shortly afterwards.

As soon as the ground was in proper condition, baseball playing began, to the exclusion almost of every other field sport. As he was not invited to join the regular Hall team, Gus Plum organized a nine of his own, with himself as pitcher and Nat Poole as catcher.

" We'll practice up and then issue a challenge to the regular team," said the bully to his crony. " If we manage to defeat them they will have to let

our club represent the academy in the important outside games."

At the proper time Phil tried twelve boys who wished to get on the regular team of the school. Of these youths four were selected to join the squad, either as regulars or substitutes. Of these four Dave was one.

"Your batting is all right, Dave," said Phil, after the selections had been made. "And your throwing is good and strong. Do you know what I would like you to do? I'd like you to practice pitching."

"Pitching!" ejaculated Dave. "Do you think I could pitch?" And his face took on an interested look. He had often had a desire to "fill the box," but had never thought himself able to do it.

"Well, you try it, and we'll see how you make out," answered the captain of the club. "At present I am going to put you out in left field, where you can run for flies and throw the ball to the plate, if it's necessary."

The boys who had tried to get on the team and had failed were much disappointed, and Plum and Poole had little difficulty in persuading them to join the rival club, as it got to be called. Then practicing began in earnest, and was kept up nearly every day after school hours.

By the middle of May the weather was perfect

for baseball, and it was arranged that the rival clubs of the school should meet on the following Saturday to try conclusions. Everybody was eager for the test, and the entire school assembled, with not a few students from Rockville, to see the game.

"Here is where we show that crowd what we can do," said Plum to Poole. "We ought to whip them out of their hides."

"We will, too," answered the aristocratic youth.

Phil's club went to the bat first, and after several errors on the part of Plum's players managed to get two runs. Then the rival team scored one run, and this score held until the fourth inning, when Phil's side scored three runs and Plum's team one run. The fifth was a "goose egg" for each, and in the sixth Phil made a home run, which brought forth great applause. In the seventh Dave made a beautiful two-base hit, and came in on another two-base hit by Roger. At the end of that inning the score stood, Lawrence's Club, 9; Plum's Club, 5.

"I want you to pitch this next inning," said Phil to Dave.

"Very well, I'll do my best," answered Dave.

When the boy from the country walked out to the slab, Plum and Poole smiled to themselves.

"Now is our chance," whispered Plum, to the boy at the bat. "He isn't half the pitcher that

other fellow is. Sock it for keeps." And the batsman nodded, to show that he understood.

Dave measured his distance with care, and sent the sphere in.

"Ball one!" called the umpire. "Too high."

Again the ball came in, but the batsman did not strike at it.

"Strike one!"

"Don't worry, Leeds, take your time," cautioned Plum.

Again the ball was delivered, and Leeds brought his bat around heavily. Up went the sphere into the air. It was a pop fly, and the first baseman caught it with ease.

The next player to the bat was Nat Poole. He had two balls called and then a strike. Then the ball came in swiftly. He struck once more—and missed it.

"Strike two!"

"Be careful," cautioned Gus Plum, who was the player "on deck."

"I know what I'm doing," growled the aristocratic youth.

Once again the sphere came in. Dave had signaled a slow drop. It was a tantalizing ball, and Poole made a wild pass at it.

"Strike three! Batter out!" called the umpire.

"Oh, pshaw!" muttered Nat Poole.

"I told you to be careful," was Plum's com-

ment. "Now, see me land it for a couple of bases. It's dead easy with such a pitcher."

One ball was called and then a strike on the bully. The next time the sphere came in swiftly.

"Strike two!"

The ball went back rapidly to Dave, who looked at the plate just a second and then sent it in like lightning—before Plum could think about hitting it.

"Strike three! Batter out!"

"Go on with you! That was a ball!" yelled Gus Plum. He dashed the bat to the ground. "It was away out."

"It was directly over the plate," said the umpire, and told the truth.

"You're trying to cheat us out of the game," cried Nat Poole. "Why don't you play fair?"

At once a dozen players were talking, and a number of the outside crowd joined in. The majority sided with the umpire.

"It was certainly a strike," said Dave. "It was one of the best balls I pitched."

"That's a fact," came from Roger, who was catching. "Plum is mad because he was struck out, that's all."

"I ain't going to stay here and be cheated!" roared the bully. "I'll throw up the game first!" and he did. The umpire said the game must go

to Phil's club, and it did, and Plum was hissed from the playground.

"What a big fool he is!" was Ben's comment. "That was a perfect strike and Plum knows it."

"Some of the other players wanted to finish the game, but Plum wouldn't let them," said Shadow. "They are as mad as hornets." And Hamilton was right; and the bully's club disbanded without another game.

After this unpleasantness the regular Oak Hall nine practiced harder than ever. Dave kept up his work at batting and pitching, and Phil was much pleased with him.

"He has a good eye," said the captain of the club. "He can put a ball just where he wants to," and in this statement Phil was right. It did not matter if Dave was in the field or on the slab, if he wanted to send in the sphere over the plate, or directly to one of the bases, he did it.

The customary challenge had been sent to Rockville and was accepted, the game to be played on the Oak Hall grounds. For the occasion a small grand stand was erected and tastefully decorated with flags and bunting. Both of the schools "chipped in," and hired the Rockville Cornet Band. Many visitors from the vicinity came to see the game, and so did Oliver Wadsworth, Professor Potts, Senator Morr, and Mr. Harris Lawrence, Phil's father. The latter was a heavy-set,

pleasant-looking shipping merchant, and shook hands with all the members of the club.

" Phil has been telling me about you," said Mr. Lawrence. " I expect to see a great game," and he laughed heartily.

" What do you think! " whispered Phil to Dave, just before the game started. " Father wants me to leave school next month, and take a trip on one of his ships to some South Sea islands! "

" Leave school and go to the South Seas! " echoed Dave, and his face fell. " We'll be sorry to lose you, Phil. But it will be a glorious outing for you."

" Father wants me to go on some special business. He doesn't want to put it in the supercargo's hands," explained Phil, and then he was called away to another part of the field.

The day was a perfect one, and the crowd was on hand fully half an hour before the great game began. Each club was given fifteen minutes for practice, and then the umpire came forward, watch in hand.

" Time is up," said he. " Get ready."

Rockville had the choice of inning, and sent Oak Hall to the bat. The Military Academy had a left-handed pitcher who was unusually swift, and who could throw a surprising in-shoot. Gasperfelder was his name, and many looked to him to win the game.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW A GREAT GAME WAS WON

THE game began amid a breathless silence. Shadow Hamilton was the first to the bat, and he was retired on strikes. Roger followed, and then came Dave, who by the merest chance managed to reach first. But before Dave could steal down to second, the fourth man up went out on strikes.

"Hurrah! A goose egg for Oak Hall!" came from the Rockville followers, and they began to yell and use their horns and rattles.

"Gasperfelder is certainly a good pitcher," was Phil's sober comment.

"Yes, but it is a question if he can pitch nine innings like that," said Ben, who was one of the substitutes.

A student named Jennings was in the box for Oak Hall, he having pitched the first innings against Gus Plum's team. He was swift, but had spells when he became badly rattled.

"Now, Jennings, do your best," said the captain of the club. "Don't let them rattle you."

"If I get rattled, put Porter in the box," said the pitcher, who knew his own weakness.

The first Rockville player up was struck out in quick order, and the followers of the Hall cheered roundly. But the second player made a safe hit, which was followed by a two-bagger to left field. Then came another single; and when the inning ended Rockville had scored two runs.

"Never mind," said Phil, bravely, in the midst of the din made by the visitors. "One inning isn't nine."

"I knew Rockville would beat!" cried Gus Plum, with a gleam of triumph in his crafty eyes. "I hope they lick Lawrence's team good, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Poole. "It will teach 'em a lesson." Such a thing as loyalty to their own school never once occurred to them.

No runs were scored in the second inning, and only one run by Rockville in the third. In the fourth inning, when Dave was in the field and two players were on base, a high fly was knocked far over the third baseman's head.

"Porter!" cried Phil. And Dave ran for the ball with all speed. It was coming down before he got anywhere near it, but by a long leap he scooped it in with his right hand and held it.

"Look at that! Wasn't that a great catch!"

"Finest catch I've seen on these grounds!" And then a wild cheering went up.

In the fifth inning there were "big things do-

ing," as one player put it, and this condition of affairs continued during the sixth, when both Gasperfelder and Jennings got rattled. As a consequence, at the opening of the seventh inning the score stood Oak Hall 6, Rockville Military Academy, 11.

"This is bad," said Roger, with a sigh. "We have got to pull ourselves together if we want to overcome that lead."

Besides becoming rattled, Jennings had been struck in the arm by a "liner," and he was perfectly willing to retire from the box and give Dave a chance to pitch. He was thoroughly loyal, even though disappointed.

"Go in and win," he said to Dave. "Strike every one of 'em out, if you can!"

"No such luck," answered Dave, with a quiet smile. "But I'll do what I can."

No runs were made at the opening of the seventh inning, so the score still stood 6 to 11 when Dave took his position to face the rivals. As he went out some of the Rockville supporters let up catcalls and jeers.

"Jennings has had enough of it!"

"Say, but our boys won't do a thing to that new pitcher!"

"He's a green one. They'll bat him all over the field."

It must be admitted that Dave's heart beat very

fast as he took the ball and signaled to Roger, who was behind the plate. One of Rockville's heaviest hitters was facing him, and he knew he must be careful.

" Perhaps I had better let him have his base on balls," he thought, but that was " baby ball," to his notion, and he sent in a good, swift ball directly over the plate. The batsman struck at it, and sent it out to near center, getting first easily.

" That's the way to do it! " cried a Rockville coach. " Keep the ball a-rolling, Jackson! "

Jackson was also a good hitter, and after having two strikes called on him, he lined out a hot one to third base, just within the foul limit. Then came another hit, which brought in a run, and a fumble at second that resulted in another run and an out.

" Hurrah, 13 to 6! " was the shout. " We've got 'em beat to a standstill! " And again the rattles went off, followed by a loud tooting of horns, and a wild waving of Rockville banners.

The cheers made Dave set his teeth hard. He whispered a few words to Roger, and then hurried back to his place. In came the ball with a decided outward curve, and the batsman missed it completely. Then he missed twice more.

" Batter out! "

" Good! " shouted Phil. " That's the way to do it, Dave! "

The next youth up knocked a foul, which was caught by the third baseman, and this brought the inning to a close.

"Now, fellows, we have got to make seven runs," said Phil, earnestly.

"I wish we could make two or three," said the shortstop.

"Come on and make eight," said Shadow, as he walked to the plate. He was growing desperate, and made a wild pass at the first ball pitched. Then he struck again and managed to reach first on a fumbled grounder.

As before, Roger followed, and he also got to first, while Shadow advanced to third. Then Dave came up.

"There is the new pitcher," cried several. "He is sure to be struck out."

Dave heard these remarks and they made his face burn. Come what might he determined that he would not miss the ball. He must knock a foul, if nothing else.

As luck would have it, the first ball sent in was too high, but it was, nevertheless, called a strike. Then came a second, just where Dave wanted it. Whack! He struck it fairly and squarely, and out it sailed to deep center.

"Hurrah! Run, Dave, run!" was the cry. "Come in, Shadow! Come in, Roger!" And Shadow and Roger did come in, running as if for

their lives. Dave reached first with ease and fairly leaped to second. Then he looked out in the field, and started for third.

"Come on! come on!" screamed Ben, dancing around like a madman. "Come on! You've got plenty of time!" And he beckoned with might and main, as if to help the running thereby.

The third baseman pretended to reach for the ball just as Dave came up to him. Seeing this Dave dropped down on the ground and dove for the bag with his right hand. But the ball was not yet coming up, and in a twinkling the country boy was up again and starting for the home plate.

"Run! run!" yelled half a hundred voices in unison. "Run!" And Dave did run as he had never run before, coming over the plate with such an impetus that he was carried fairly to the players' bench beyond. Then the ball was sent in—but it was much too late.

How the Oak Hall boys did shout and cheer, and swing their rattles and blow their horns! It was as if pandemonium had broken loose, and it lasted for several minutes.

"It was the greatest home run ever made on these grounds," declared Roger, later on. "The very greatest."

"And the best of it is, it brought in three runs," came from Phil, as he clapped Dave on the back. "That helps the score wonderfully."

The home run put new life into the Oak Hall club, and when the half of the eighth inning came to a close, the score stood, Oak Hall 11, Rockville Military Academy 14.

"Here is our last chance to tie the score," said Phil. "Boys, we must do it. Play as you never played before."

The shortstop was the first batter up, and managed to get to first in safety. Then came Phil, who knocked out a three-bagger with tremendous vigor. Next came two base hits, and then a wild throw from third to first. When the wild play came to an end the last batter was safe on second, and three runs had been scored.

"14 to 14!" was the cry. "A tie!"

"Gasperfelder is going to pieces!"

"Put in a new pitcher!"

So the talk went on until the pitcher whispered to the captain. Then another pitcher came onto the field. He tried his best to hold Oak Hall down, but could not, and when at last the first half of the ninth inning came to a close the score stood Oak Hall 16, Rockville Military Academy 14.

"Dave, can you hold them down?" said Phil, pleadingly.

"I'll try my best," answered Dave.

"Of course you will. Hold them down to one if you can—or a tie," returned the captain.

It would be useless to deny that Dave felt nerv-

ous when he walked down to the pitcher's slab. He knew that for Oak Hall to win that game depended largely upon himself.

Fortunately for Dave the first batter up was not one of Rockville's best. He got two balls and two strikes, and then another ball.

"Steady, Dave!" said Phil. "Don't let him walk."

The pitcher made a signal to Roger. He made as if to throw in the ball easily, then let drive with all the swiftness at his command.

"Three strikes! Batter out!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the Oak Hall boys. "One gone! Now go for the other two, Dave!"

"He can't put them out!" sneered Gus Plum. "Just wait and see."

It was Plum's sneer that braced the country boy as much as anything.

"That bully shan't crow over me!" he told himself, and snapped his teeth together hard. Then the ball came over the plate, and the umpire called one strike.

Again the sphere was launched forth.

"Ball one!"

"Make him give you what you want, Brown!" called out a coach.

"Make him hit it, Dave," came from the first baseman.

"Two strikes!"

"That's it, Dave!"

"Three strikes. Batter out!"

Again a wild cheering went up. The ninth inning, and Dave had struck out two players. It was certainly good ball-playing.

"Dave plays like a veteran," was Oliver Wadsworth's comment. He was as much interested as the boys.

"Yes, and this takes me back to my college days," added Caspar Potts, with a smile.

The third batsman now came forward. He was a sure and heavy hitter, and the Rockville club depended upon him to make a single, if not a two-base hit. As he took his place he glared savagely at Dave.

"I suppose he'd like to eat me," thought the young pitcher. "Well, here goes at him," and in came the ball, exactly over the plate, but so quickly that it was in Roger's hands before the batter could make up his mind to strike.

"Strike one!"

"Good! Go at him, Dave!"

"Knock the cover off the ball, Barriwell!"

Again the ball came in—this time an out curve. Barriwell struck at—and missed it.

"Strike two!"

Dave braced himself for a final effort. He gave Roger the signal, started as if to throw in the ball with all force—and sent in something slow and

tantalizing. The bat swung around—and the ball dropped safely into the catcher's hands.

"Three strikes! Batter out!"

Oak Hall had won the game!

Almost before they knew it, the home club was surrounded, and Dave was perched up on the shoulders of his friends. Yells and cheers rent the air anew, and the rattles and horns added to the general din. In the vigor of his applause Oliver Wadsworth smashed his cane to bits, and in the excitement Professor Potts waved the rim off of his old silk hat.

"But I don't care," said the old professor, gazing at the ruined headgear. "It was worth it! Dave's a—a——"

"A boy out of a thousand!" finished the manufacturer. "I'm proud of him."

"Oh, I say, boys, let me down!" pleaded Dave, gazing around helplesly. "I didn't do so much—really, I didn't!"

"Didn't do much?" cried Ben. "Why, Dave, you won the game!" And then he proposed three cheers for Dave, and they were given with a will.

The only boys who did not relish the victory were Gus Plum and Nat Poole, and when they sneered at Dave they were run off the field, and had to hide, for fear of another attack.

Although they had lost, the Rockville club took their defeat like good fellows. They had been in-

vited to dine that evening at the Hall and did so, and a good time generally was enjoyed. After the rivals had departed, the Oak Hall boys lit a big bonfire on the campus, and the festivities and jollity were kept up until almost midnight. It was a time none of our friends ever forgot.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MORE CONCERNING A MYSTERY—CONCLUSION

BOTH Oliver Wadsworth and Professor Potts remained at the village of Oakdale over night, and in the morning both called upon Dave again.

"Well, how do you feel after your victory of yesterday?" questioned the manufacturer.

"First-rate," answered Dave, with a warm smile.

"I suppose you don't feel like buckling down to your studies again, do you?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"I knew it!" cried Caspar Potts. "Whatever Dave does, he does with all his heart and soul. Nothing can stop him." And he nodded his head over and over again.

Oliver Wadsworth looked at the boy keenly, and there was a second of silence.

"Dave, I've got something to tell you," said the gentleman, soberly. "I don't know if it is important or not, but it looks to me as if it might be. That sick man, Billy Dill, is recovering rapidly, and when I stopped to see him before I came here, he expressed a strong desire to see you."

"Recovering? Is he in his right mind?"

"He appears to be—and yet he talks in a very strange way."

"About me?"

"About you, or somebody that looks like you. He wants to see you very much. He claims that you are his old friend. But of course that can't be. He is sane enough on other subjects, so the doctor told me."

"I'd like to see him."

"Well, I'll take you to see him this afternoon. I have already arranged it with Dr. Clay."

They started directly after dinner, and by three o'clock Dave and Mr. Wadsworth were at the private sanitarium to which the old tar had been transferred. When they entered the sick man's room they found him walking the floor with a true nautical swagger.

"Hullo, my hearty! so you've hove in sight at last!" he cried, as he took Dave's hand and gave it an earnest grip. "I thought I was stranded here and abandoned."

"I am glad to see you so well," answered Dave, and looked the tar squarely in the eyes.

"Been many a year since we met, ain't it?" queried Billy Dill. "Must be fifteen or twenty, eh? But you don't look older—you look younger."

"Do you really think you met me before? I

mean before you had that trouble with Tag Dutch?"

"O' course, I do, friend. But it's a good way back, ain't it?" The sailor scratched his head. "And that crack has knocked it clear out o' reckoning." He heaved a sigh. "You've been good to me, sir," he went on to Oliver Wadsworth. "I ain't goin' to forgit it, not me!"

"Where did you meet me?" went on Dave, striving to be calm, although he was becoming tremendously interested.

"Where? Why, out there on Cavasa Island in the South Seas. Don't you remember the old ship —let's see, I can't remember her name—and that crazy nurse—the one who lost the child—the little boy? Of course you do?"

"A crazy nurse who lost a little boy!" ejaculated Oliver Wadsworth. "Who was she?"

"Who was she?" repeated Billy Dill. "He knows." He pointed to Dave. "I reckon it was his son, or his nephew, I've forgotten which." He pressed his hand to his temple. "Queer, how things get away from a man—sometimes I'm away out o' my reckonin'."

"So you think I'm the person who lost the little boy?" faltered Dave, his breast heaving with emotion. "Did that man look exactly like me?"

"As like as two peas—only he had a mustache.

Then you are sure it wasn't you? I'm mixed, I know."

"Do you remember how the boy was lost?"

"No—excepting that it happened in this country. It's so long ago, so long ago! And my head spins like a reel."

"Did you leave this man at Cavasa Island?" asked Mr. Wadsworth.

"I reckon I did,—but I don't know where he is now."

"Can you tell anything more about him?" asked Dave.

"Maybe, some other time. My head is in a twist now." The old tar was beginning to grow excited. "The sea sings in my ears and the lighthouses dance before my eyes. I wish I was on the old ship again."

"What ship was it?"

"I can't remember her name—I can't remember any names, only faces." The sailor muttered something under his breath and then began to tramp the floor and give orders, as if he was on the deck of a ship.

"You had better not ask any more questions," whispered the attendant. "He may grow violent."

"We'll come again some other day," said Oliver Wadsworth, and then he and Dave withdrew.

"Mr. Wadsworth, do you think there is any-

thing in this—I mean anything that concerns me?" asked the youth, when leaving the sanitarium.

"I am not prepared to say, Dave. It is at the least a curious happening. We must wait until the sailor's mind is clearer before we can question him again."

When Dave returned to Oak Hall he was very sober and thoughtful. It seemed to him that the baseball game had taken place a long time ago, and he could not settle down to his studies.

"Phil," he said to his friend, "your father has ships sailing to the South Seas. Do you know anything of Cavasa Island?"

"To be sure I do! That is to be one of my stopping places when I take my trip. It's not a very large place, but the town has quite a number of white people in it, and the shipping is considerable."

"What would you say if I should want to take that trip with you?"

"What, the trip to the South Seas?"

"Yes, to Cavasa Island, and to other ports in that vicinity."

"Do you really mean it, Dave?"

"Yes, if matters turn out as I think they may," was the answer. "Phil, can I trust you with a—a—something of a secret?"

"You know you can, Dave."

"Then I want to tell you something," was the

answer, and sitting down, Dave told his chum of what had taken place during the visit to the sanitarium.

"That is certainly a mystery," said Phil. "I'd wait and see if this Billy Dill has anything more to say. I'm not going to leave just yet." And Dave did wait, and in the end learned so many wonderful things that he lost no time in preparing for the trip of thousands of miles over the deep blue sea. What happened on that trip will be related in another volume, to be entitled, "Dave Porter in the South Seas; or, The Strange Cruise of the *Stormy Petrel.*" In this new volume we shall meet many of our old friends again, and learn what Dave did towards clearing up the mystery which surrounded his parentage.

Two days later the boys of dormitories No. 11 and No. 12 had a quiet celebration of their own. The monitor Murphy was let into the secret, and as Job Haskers was away on a visit to some relatives, nobody came to disturb them. The boys had all sorts of good things to eat, besides soda water and root beer, and two gallons of ice cream, smuggled into the rooms under the very nose of Pop Swingly, the janitor. Shadow Hamilton told some of his best stories, and one of the boys read a poem composed in honor of the baseball club's victory. At this celebration Chip Macklin was present and enjoyed it as much as anybody.

" I'm glad I cut loose from Gus Plum and Nat Poole," said he to Dave. " I never want to have anything to do with them again."

" Nor I," added Dave. " They can go their way, and I'll go mine." But Dave was not to get rid of the bully and his aristocratic crony so easily, as later events proved.

The celebration was kept up until two o'clock in the morning. When it came to an end and all the boys were ready to retire, Roger stepped to a window which was partly open.

" What are you going to do? " asked Ben.

" Make a report of the proceedings," said Roger, and produced a big cannon cracker. " Got those matches, Dave? "

" Yes," answered Dave, and striking one, he lit the fuse of the cannon cracker. Then Roger hurled the cracker into the courtyard below—and all hopped into bed.

Bang! It was a tremendous report, and awoke every person in the building. Lights were lit, and windows were thrown up on all sides.

" What was that? "

" Has something blown up? "

So the questions were asked, but nobody could give an answer. An investigation was made, but nothing came of it. The boys kept quiet, and those in dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 looked as innocent as lambs.

And so the victory and the celebration came to an end; and here let us leave Dave Porter, knowing full well that, no matter what might come in the future, never would he forget the days spent at Oak Hall.

THE END

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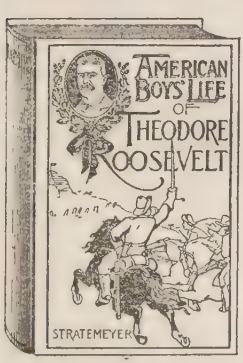

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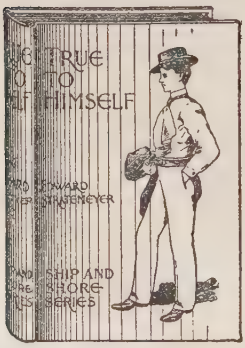

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